

BEADLE'S Dime New York Library

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Vol. VI.

Published Every
Two Weeks.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., July 16th, 1879.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$2.50 a Year.

No. 72

The Phantom Hand;

OR,

The Heiress of Fifth Avenue.

A Story of New York Hearths and Homes.

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NEW YORK 'SHARP,'" "INJUN DICK," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BROADWAY AT NINE O' THE NIGHT.

A CLEAR, calm evening in the month of March, in the year of our Lord, 1870.

In a doorway on Broadway, near the corner of Leonard street, sat a man. The bells had just rung out nine on the night-air, and the great highway, below Canal street, was almost deserted.

The man, who sat shivering—for the night-air was chill and cut him to the bone—in the doorway, was thinly and shabbily clad in a rusty suit, worn threadbare, the white seams

carefully stained black with ink, as if the wearer desired to conceal his poverty and appear as much like a gentleman as possible. A crushed and battered felt hat was adjusted carefully upon his head, in what he evidently conceived to be a rakish and jaunty fashion. A pair of wretched boots, that hardly kept his feet from the cold pavements, completed his dress.

The frock coat, buttoned tightly to the throat, told of the absence of clean linen; while his pale thin face showed want and misery as plainly as his shabby dress.

One would have judged the man to have been thirty-five or forty years old.

That pallid face would have excited attention even in a crowd. Singularly white in hue, it yet gleamed with a rare intelligence, and was framed, as it were, by jet-black curls, hanging down in little straggling ringlets. A thin mustache and imperial adorned the upper lip and chin. A pair of great gray eyes, that looked black a dozen paces off—eyes that now shone like balls of fire so wildly did they gleam—were windows to a soul of rare inspiration, whose owner looked like a gentleman despite the seedy dress and rough, unshaven face; but the lines about the handsome mouth—the weak,

wavering lines—spoke plainly of an irresolute will.

The man was a wreck—a temporary wreck both physically and mentally. The heaven-gifted genius that should have led him on to fame had proved his ruin.

The name by which the world knew him was Edmund Mordaunt. By profession, an actor, he had achieved the laurel wreath and had been deemed worthy to wear the mantle of Kemble or Kean. But prosperity and friends were too much for him. He yielded to the siren of Drink; the Spirit of Wine had touched his veins with its fatal fire. Step by step he went down the social ladder, until at last he found himself an outcast and beggar! Vainly had scheming caterers for the public—anxious to secure the dollars that his genius was sure to attract—tried to keep him from the cup that had proved his ruin. All efforts resulted in failure, and one by one friends deserted the inebriate and left him to wallow in the mire where their hands had helped to place him.

So that on that chill March night Edmund Mordaunt found himself sitting on Broadway, shivering in the cold, and without a single penny in the world wherewith to appease hunger



"IF THERE'S A REWARD OFFERED, AND YOU'VE GOT A CLUE TO WORK ON, WHY YOU KIN COME AN' 'SEE ME.'"

and thirst. Food had not passed his lips for four and twenty hours. Vainly he had sought his former applauding friends, who, when his handsome, manly figure graced the boards of the theater, and the wondrous poetry of Avon's Bard came in liquid music from his lips, were wild in their enthusiasm, but turned in disgust from the thin-faced and sunken-eyed beggar who prayed for food. It is the way of the world.

"Poor Tom's a-cold!" muttered the shivering man, folding his arms tightly around his body as though to impart warmth by the action. "I wonder where I'm going to sleep to-night? 'To die—to sleep; perchance to dream,'" and a deep sigh came from the weary soul of the wretched outcast.

"Will anybody give me ten cents to save my life?" he cried, suddenly, extending his arms as if addressing an audience. "Oh, my head feels queer," he muttered, with a half-groan, letting his head fall upon his bosom. Then he passed his hand, nervously, across his brow. "Ah! I wonder if I'm going to have the tremors again? I don't see any snakes—but I feel sick—sick. Ay, sick of life!

"Life!" cried the wreck, with a bitter, cynical cough, that rung out shrilly on the night-air. "It isn't life—it's living death to him who has the demon of drink ever at his side. Drink—drink—give me drink!" he cried, in tones full of the pathos of despair. "Oh, God, deliver me from this curse!" he wailed, his thin white hands held pleading up to heaven. "To-night I condescended to beg from a stranger, and was spurned as a 'drunken brute.' He was a nice, black, curly-haired chap, though dressed like a coal-heaver. I'll never forget his face as long as I live. A handsome fellow, but a devil. I'll swear it by his eyes—those windows to the soul. Oh! I'd give any thing for food and a drink. I'm burning up inside; this thirst is killing me. I could swallow liquid fire. Oh! my head!"

The footsteps of a man coming down Broadway fell upon the ears of the miserable creature. "Here comes somebody," he muttered; "shall I try once more? It's only a refusal, and I've fallen so low that my pride ought to be all gone now. Yes, I'll try. I *must* have liquor or I shall go mad."

Mordaunt rose to his feet, but staggered from weakness, and but for the friendly support of the wall would have fallen.

"I'm about done for. I shall 'pass in my checks' soon," he muttered, with a ghastly attempt at a smile. "It's a young man," he continued, as the stranger came in sight; "perhaps there'll be some spark of pity in his heart. 'One touch of nature makes all the world akin.'"

Then the wreck advanced and met the stranger.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for accosting you in this manner," said the outcast, touching his hat with graceful politeness; "but I am in want—in great want. Can you oblige me with a loan? If it's only ten cents, sir, I shall be grateful."

The stranger paused. The rays of the gas-light fell full upon the features of Mordaunt, while the other's were in the shade.

For a moment the new-comer gazed into the face of the beggar. The pale, wan features proved that the wretched man had spoken truly.

"You are really suffering?" asked the stranger.

Mordaunt could not repress a start. The voice was strangely familiar to him. Where had he heard it before?

"Yes, sir," the actor said. "I am indeed in want or I should not ask you, a stranger, for assistance. I believe you are a stranger to me, sir, although your voice sounds familiar to me."

"I am sure that I have never met you before, for I seldom forget a face," rejoined the other.

"Strange," said Mordaunt, with a puzzled shake of the head. "I can almost swear that I've heard your voice before. My ear used to be excellent before liquor used me up." The simple words told the history of a wasted life.

"I can see in your manner, sir, that you are a gentleman," said the young man, in his clear, frank voice. "I feel an inclination to aid you, although you are a stranger to me. Here's a five-dollar bill," and the young man took the "greenback" from his pocket-book, together with a card. "And this is my card. If you will call at my residence, No. 268 Fifth avenue, to-morrow, I'll see what I can do for you further."

Then the stranger gave the bill and card into the trembling

hands of the wreck; and as he did so, stepped forward, so that the gaslight shone upon his face.

Mordaunt gazed with wonder upon the countenance of the donor, while mechanically his hand grasped the bill and the card. There was nothing in the face to excite wonder. It was that of a young man of three and twenty—a handsome face; the hair a dark brown, curling tightly to the head; the eyes dark-blue, almost black. The features were regular; the skin of an olive tinge.

Yet Mordaunt gazed at the young man as though a specter stood before him.

"Heavens!" he cried, in astonishment not unmixed with dismay.

"What's the matter?" asked the young man.

"Did you pass here about an hour ago, dressed roughly in a pea-jacket and with a black slouch hat?"

"No," said the stranger, astonished at the question.

"Am I going mad?" cried the actor, in bewilderment.

"Sir, as I stood here, an hour ago, I begged assistance from a man that passed, and who spoke to me harshly and went on. That man had your face—your hair—your eyes—your very voice; he was your living image. Have you a twin brother?"

"No; I am an only son," replied the stranger.

Mordaunt passed his hand across his forehead as if to recall his scattered thoughts.

"I am in a maze," he said, at length; "this man had your very movements, even. Can I have dreamed all this? Are my brains all burnt up by liquor?"

"It is possibly your fancy," said the young man. "What is your name?"

"Edward Mordaunt."

"I shall remember. By the way, isn't this Leonard street here?" and the stranger pointed to the corner.

"Yes."

"How many streets down to Baxter?"

"Baxter is the third street."

"Good-night."

The young man turned into Leonard street and disappeared.

The actor stood as one in a maze.

"What can a gentleman like that want in Baxter street—the worst hole in all New York—at this hour of the night? Ah!" And Mordaunt started as a thought flashed into his mind. "The other—his walking image—turned down Leonard street; that is, if I am not mad or have not dreamed it. Can these two men have any thing in common—the one who has treated me like a Christian and the other who has treated me as a dog? Something tells me to follow this man—that he is in danger. He is a stranger in this locality, that is certain. No stranger is safe, alone, in the shadows of Baxter. Can it be that he is being lured into danger? Either I am mad or else my excited mind sees things with a spiritual clearness, and I feel that there is a shadow hovering over that man's footsteps. A shadow—a shadow! and it takes the shape of his own image that passed this same way an hour ago. No, I'm not crazed. I *feel* that my generous friend is walking into a snare. Shall I not follow? Ay, but what can I, with my shattered nerves and trembling limbs, do to aid that friend if he shall need it? Do? Why, I am strong! Mordaunt is himself again when duty and humanity call! I'll follow and be his good shadow, though all the devils of Baxter street shrieked 'Away!' in my ears."

The actor thrust the bill into his pocket, and looked at the card that the young man said bore his address. On it, in a bold, manly hand, was written:

ALLYNE STRATHROY,
No. 268 FIFTH AVENUE.

"Strathroy," muttered Mordaunt to himself, as he hurried onward down Leonard street toward Elm; "it is a Scotch name—it is not familiar to me."

CHAPTER II.

THE STRATHROY MYSTERY.

In the front room of a small, two-story wooden house on Baxter street, some few doors from Leonard street, sat two persons. One was a man well advanced in years, though his massive frame and rugged features showed few marks of old father Time's withering hand. His face was of the bulldog type—heavy, firm-set jaws, low, overhanging forehead, little, gleaming eyes; the hair jet-black and cropped tight to

the head. He was known as John Duke, and more familiarly called Duke, the Slasher. By profession, he was a "shoulder-hitter"—a burglar, too, at times; a noted ward politician—one whom the law was always reaching for, and yet one whom the law seldom harmed. For Duke, the Slasher, had friends high in power—friends for whom his strong right arm often had struck in a closely contested election.

John Duke was a representative of a class that exists only in New York city. Nowhere in all our land can we find the professional bully hand and glove with the officers of justice, but in the "Great Metropolis."

The other was quite a young man, of about three and twenty. He was a handsome fellow, with his finely proportioned, muscular form, his dark-blue eyes, that looked black a few paces off, his regular and clearly-cut features, his olive-tinged skin, and his dark-brown hair that curled tightly to his head.

He was called James Kidd—a child of chance, born he knew not where; reared, he knew not how. His earliest remembrance was of the street—of hard words and of still harder blows. He had grown to manhood an outcast and a thief. A bad fortune had thrown him in the way of the notorious Slasher. That worthy was pleased with the quick, keen-eyed lad. He saw that he had brains. He was the man he had been looking for. So John Duke and James Kidd became friends—partners.

For three years they had been associates. And in those three years the desperate Slasher had learned to fear the tool which he had taken in his hand. He had discovered that Kidd was fully as reckless of personal danger as himself; almost his match in strength, and more than his match in skill. In dash and audacity the young man far outdid the veteran bruiser.

The Slasher fully realized that his instrument had become his master. The brains of Kidd raised him far above the level of the shoulder-hitter.

The room in which the two sat was quite small, and had a moldy smell that told of age and decay. The windows that looked upon the street were barred by heavy shutters as though the inmates feared the daylight. A small table, on which was placed a lighted candle, two common chairs and a little iron bedstead composed the furniture of the apartment.

This was the home of James Kidd.

"Jimmy," said the Slasher, suddenly, and casting a searching glance at the face of his companion, "what's the matter with you—what's broke?"

"Why do you ask?" said Kidd, in a rich voice, that was an agreeable contrast to the hoarse tone of the bruiser.

"Oh, jist for greens!" observed the Slasher, with a chuckle. "For 'bout ten days I've noticed that you ain't O. K.—that you've been down in the mouth. What's up now, say?"

"Duke, ten days ago I fell in love," said the young man, with a forced laugh.

"You don't tell me so!" cried Duke, in amazement. "Who's the gal? Do I know her?"

"Oh, no!" responded Kidd, quickly, a look of disgust passing over his face. "She is not one of the kind that we meet. She's a lady—a Fifth avenue belle—and as far removed from me as heaven is from earth."

"Well, of all the mad fancies that I ever *did* hear tell of!" said the Slasher, in wonder. "Why, what put this cussed nonsense into your head?"

"I'll tell you all about it," said Kidd, slowly. "I was up to the Academy of Music one Saturday. I was waiting outside to see Billy McLean, by appointment, to find out how much he was willing to come down for our crowd, in case we agreed to support him for alderman. As I stood on the steps waiting for him to come out this girl came down the steps and entered her carriage. Never before in my life had I seen a woman that I would have turned my head to look at a second time, but, the moment my eyes fell on this girl's face I said to myself, 'To obtain that girl I'd give ten years of my life.'"

Duke started at the tone in which the young man spoke.

"Oh, now! that's cutting it too fat," the Slasher said, with a grin; "ten years is a long time. I found one year mighty long when I was up to Sing Sing."

"This woman—or girl rather, for she's only eighteen—is worth it," said Kidd.

"Well, I never see'd the gal yet that I'd go my pile on, except a sister of mine, an' she died with a broken heart, 'cos she was too good for this world," said the Slasher, thoughtfully.

"The girl has made me mad!" cried Kidd, fiercely, his eyes gleaming with passion, and the big veins standing out like whip-cords on his forehead. "I can think of nothing but her. She is ever before my eyes, sleeping or waking. I have determined to have her, come what may."

"The devil you have!" exclaimed the Slasher in amazement.

"Yes," replied the other, "I found out all about her. She is an orphan and engaged to be married."

"Well, that blocks your little game."

"No, it aids it."

Duke looked at the speaker in astonishment.

"I don't understand!"

"Very likely, but I do," returned the young man. "I have a plan in my head that is the scheme of a madman, and yet I am going to attempt it. It is so bold that none but a madman can succeed."

"And are you mad?" said the Slasher, not able to comprehend the strange words of his companion.

"Yes, at present; mad with love's frenzy," replied the young man.

"Well, I can't make head or tail of what you've been saying," said the puzzled shoulder-hitter.

"Very likely. As I have said, a madman alone could form the plan that I am about to attempt to carry out; so a madman alone could guess it."

"Well, anyway, I shall know whether you succeed or fail."

"No, you are wrong," replied the other; "no one in this world will know it—not even the girl herself."

Duke began to think that his companion had gone mad in reality.

"How can you marry the girl—'cos I s'pose that's what you're after—without her knowing that you do marry her?" he asked.

"That is my secret. But, I tell you, John Duke, that if my plan succeeds, I, the child of chance, the outcast, will marry this girl, and yet she herself will not know that she marries James Kidd, the rough of Baxter street."

"Mighty little 'rough' there is about you," said Duke.

"I may puzzle wiser heads than yours, Duke, before I get through with this work," said the young man, coldly. "I am tired of my present life. It is too petty, low, circumscribed for me. I am capable of better things. I mean to rise in the world, and shall not hesitate as to the means, even though I redden my path with blood. I was not born for little things."

Cold as ice was the tone of the speaker, but fierce was the determination expressed therein. Duke—ruffian, blood-stained villain, as he was—felt a thrill of horror come over him, as he looked upon the gleaming eyes of the man before him.

"He's a devil—a very devil!" Duke muttered to himself, in an undertone. "But he'll do what he says, that I know."

"By the way, Duke, you mentioned a certain person the other day, that I should like to know more of; this Allyne Strathroy. You told me that his father disappeared some twenty-two years ago, and has never been heard of since. You also said that you knew why he had disappeared."

"So I do," said Duke; "I know all about it, and if it hadn't been for me, Clinton Strathroy—that's the name of this Allyne's father—would probably be in New York, alive, to-day."

"Yes, you stabbed him in the open street twenty-three years ago, for which crime you were sent to Sing Sing for five years," said Kidd, slowly.

"That's true; but as my services were extremely valuable in a certain election, my political friends got me pardoned out after serving a year. But, how did you know 'bout that affair? You were a kid then?" asked the Slasher, in astonishment.

"I read the account in an old file of the *Herald*. It stated that the assault was caused by some personal quarrel between you and this Clinton Strathroy."

"I'll tell you all about it," said Duke, after a moment's thought. "In 1846 I was quite a young fellow. I was a butcher-boy by trade, but I didn't do much work, 'cos I liked to loaf around the engine-houses better, or to go off on a tear with the boys. I had a sister just eighteen years old, an' she was jist as pretty a gal as a man would want to look at. She 'tended in a fancy goods store on the Bowery. In some way this Clinton Strathroy got acquainted with her. He pretended to love her, and she—poor, foolish child—thought that this wealthy Fifth-avenue 'blood' meant honest by her."

Just at this time I had to leave New York, 'cos in a little rumpus at a fire in the Bowery, I pretty near killed a policeman, an' I had to get out of the way until the affair blew over. When I came back to New York, Lizzie—that was my sister's name—had disappeared. I hunted for her high and low, for Lize was the only one in this world that I cared two cents for. But, I couldn't find her. I found out, of course, that this Clinton Strathroy had been making love to her. I had a suspicion that he knew where she was, so I went to his house on Fifth avenue, but he was not at home. Then I felt sure that he had something to do with Lizzie's going away. I kept a close watch upon this man's house. For a whole year he was away from New York; then he returned, bringing a wife with him—a Southern gal—that he had just married. Then for the first time I began to think that perhaps I had wronged him in regard to my sister. But about six months after that time, I was down on the docks one day, when a Charleston steamer landed, and from the steamer, carrying a babby in her arms, came Lizzie. It was the old story. This Clinton Strathroy had persuaded her to run away with him. They had been married by some minister here in New York. She had forgotten the name and the place where she had been married, and Strathroy had kept the marriage certificate—that is, if there ever was such a thing, 'cos I thought all the while that she had been gulled by a mock-marriage. After the marriage he had taken her down South. There the child was born, a boy. After the birth of the child, Strathroy began to treat her coldly, and at last, one day, he told her that it was all over between them—that she was not lawfully his wife—and then he deserted her. She managed at last to beg her way to New York. After she told me how she had been treated by this man, I went for him—met him on Broadway, and stabbed him on sight. For that I was arrested and sent to Sing Sing. Strathroy recovered. I had put my sister in comfortable lodgings, in Hester street, but while I was in prison she died—died of a broken heart. I sent for her babby and made arrangements to have it looked after in Sing Sing village—boarded with a woman there. It was a pretty little blue-eyed babby.

"After being in Sing Sing a year, I was pardoned out. I came to New York to close up the old account, for I had sworn in open court that I'd kill Clinton Strathroy, and I meant to do it. But he, hearing that I had been pardoned, and I s'pose feeling pretty sure that I would be as good as my word, left the city and has never been heard of since."

"And what became of the child?" Kidd asked.

"I don't know. After I came to the city to settle with Clinton Strathroy, and found that he'd run away, I went back to Sing Sing to get the babby, and there I found neither woman nor child. Both had gone. The woman had stolen the babby and left with it."

"A strange circumstance."

"Yes, and from that day to this I never have heard a single word 'bout either," said the Slasher. "But, I'll tell you the queerest thing about the whole affair. My sister's babby was baptized in Charleston, South Carolina, by the name of Allyne Strathroy—Allyne was his father's name—and Strathroy's son by his wife here was also called Allyne Strathroy. So, you see, there's two Allyne Strathroy's in the world, somewhere, and I've often thought that it would be funny if these two Allynes should meet, and the first Allyne avenge upon the second the wrong that has been done his mother; and, mind you, neither of the two knowing that they are half-brothers."

"About as likely to happen as for two Sundays to come together," said Kidd.

"Exactly; but as queer things as that do happen sometimes."

"By the way, John, I expect a caller, and if you've settled all about the election affair—" Kidd said.

"Yes, all right. Good-night," and the Slasher left the room, leaving Kidd to his own fearful thoughts.

CHAPTER III.

STEALING A LIFE.

MORDAUNT, keenly alive and interested in the case before him, and which his imagination had invested with momentous interest, followed close on the heels of Allyne Strathroy, almost forgetful of the dreadful thirst that had driven him to become a beggar that night.

Strathroy turned into Baxter street and paused for a moment,

as if uncertain how to proceed. Then, after examining the number of the house before which he stood, he turned to the left. A few steps on he paused before the door of a small wooden house, and, after feeling in vain for a bell-knob, he rapped loudly on the door.

In a few seconds the door was opened and Allyne entered the house. The door closing after, hid him from the eyes of the actor, who, on the other side of the street, concealed in the shadow of a doorway, was watching him with eager eyes.

"Well, that's a nice-looking sort of a crib for a gentlemanly-looking young fellow like this one to visit. What on earth can bring him to this sweet-smelling locality?" mused Mordaunt, as he surveyed the building into which the young man had gone.

"It's all dark; no light or sign of life there," he continued. "Since I've come so far, 'pricked to't by foolish honesty and love,' I'll stay here until he comes out—that is, if he does come out. And if this is any sort of a trap into which he has fallen, he can't be put out of the way without some little noise, which I'll be apt to hear. I don't often take fancies for men; I've learned too much of the world for that; but this man is a man by whom I can swear, and I'll stand by him as by my own life. I'll watch."

So Mordaunt seated himself in a doorway and remained with his eyes intently fixed upon the mysterious-looking building opposite.

After the Slasher had departed, James Kidd paced rapidly up and down the little room for a minute or two, apparently in deep thought. His steps were noiseless, and resembled more the stealthy tread of the tiger creeping in upon its prey than the firm step of a human being.

"Will he come?" he muttered, as he paused, and for a moment listened as if seeking an answer to his question from the silence of the night. "And if he does come," he continued in his musings, "shall I?" There was a fearful meaning in the obscure question.

Then the young man set his teeth firmly together and struck the table lightly with his clenched hand.

"Yes, be it for good or evil. If it gives Blanche Maybury into my arms, or gives my neck to the hangman's noose, I will do it! Some invisible power is leading me on. Is it Fate, or is it the Original Sin, which, the ministers say, is born in us?"

Kidd went to the bed, and, turning down the covering, drew from beneath the pillow a long, narrow dagger. It was an Italian stiletto, keen and sharp as a razor. It had been ground down until it was hardly half an inch in width, although some eight inches in length.

Thoughtfully the young man ran his finger over the edges of the knife.

"This it was which the Italian burglar used when he stabbed the policeman. A single blow, and death came instantly." The muscles of the hardened face seemed to deaden into stone as he spoke the words. Involuntarily, as it were, his fingers closed about the handle of the deadly-looking weapon.

"It must be a single blow, and that sure. No noise—no violence; and then—then an effort which will require all my mind—all my nerve. I'll risk it!" And having come to this conclusion, Kidd placed the knife carefully in an inside pocket in his coat.

Allyne Strathroy, when the door was opened in the wooden shanty—for it was little better—at which he had knocked, saw before him the figure of a man. The entryway was dark; but, by the street light, Allyne could see that the man had his head tied in a colored handkerchief, and wore a pair of green spectacles.

"Does Mr. Williams reside here?" asked Strathroy.

"Yes," answered the man, in a somewhat hoarse voice.

Strathroy started. He felt sure that he had heard the voice before, somewhere; and the impression came upon him that the man was trying to disguise his voice.

"I received a note from this Mr. Williams requesting me to call here this evening about nine, as he had some information to give me in regard to a certain matter."

"Yes, sir; I understand. Will you walk up-stairs?" And the man turned and led the way through the entry. Strathroy followed, keeping, however, a wary eye upon the movements of the person before him, and quietly drawing from his pocket a little revolver, which he carried in his hand ready for use at the slightest sign of danger. Allyne

was a New Yorker, and knew full well the character of the locality in which he was. He did not intend to be led into a trap and slaughtered like a blind puppy. But, the man went straight onward, up the little, crooked stairs, and into a small room at the head of the landing. This room was plainly furnished, and lit by a single candle.

As Strathroy entered the circle of light, he carelessly slid his revolver into the side-pocket of his overcoat, still keeping his hand upon it, ready for instant action should occasion demand it.

"Sit down, sir," said the stranger, after they had entered the room. Again the voice sounded familiar to Allyne; it seemed almost like an echo of his own.

"Have you the letter, sir?" asked the man, after Allyne had sat down.

"Yes, here it is," said Allyne, laying it upon the table.

"You were not afraid to come here, at this hour?" questioned the stranger.

"No," replied Allyne; "I am armed," and he drew the revolver from his pocket, then slid it back again, "you see. Besides, I haven't a single cent upon my person. My watch, rings, etc., are all at home. So that if the design was to plunder me, you would be foiled."

"I merely asked the question for information, that is all," replied the man, while a strange light gleamed in the dark blue eyes that the green glasses hid. "I am Mr. Williams. I wrote that letter, telling you that I could give you information in regard to the fate of your father, Clinton Strathroy, who so mysteriously disappeared twenty-two years ago. But, I have failed in one important point and can not say anything to-night. If you will come here at ten to-morrow, and are willing to pay—I will take your word for the amount—you shall know the fate of your father."

Allyne looked keenly at the speaker. Despite the bandaged head, despite the green glasses, Allyne traced a resemblance in the face—a resemblance to pictures of his father, taken when that father was a young man. Strathroy was puzzled.

"To-morrow, then?" Allyne said.

"To-morrow," the man repeated.

Allyne turned to go; when, with the spring of a tiger, the stranger leaped upon him. One strong arm was wound around his neck; the flash of a keen-edged knife dazzled his eyes.

Little use was Strathroy's revolver—away in his pocket—against this unlooked-for attack. With desperate energy, Allyne strove to free himself from the iron-like grip of his unknown assailant. In the full vigor of manhood, with strength unimpaired, Strathroy, before this hour, never had met his master; but, now, vain was his effort to break the vice-like grasp of his foe.

The iron hand on his throat stifled his utterance; the steel was flashing before his eyes. With a last desperate effort—for he felt that his strength was going fast—Allyne struggled for his life.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RESULT OF THE ENCOUNTER.

MORDAUNT, sitting in the shadow of the doorway, watched anxiously for the reappearance of Allyne Strathroy. The minutes passed slowly. Thirty at least had elapsed and still the young man came not from the house.

"I'm afraid that there is something wrong," the actor muttered, his feeling of uneasiness becoming intense. "Is the only man who has showed me kindness for many a long month to be taken away from me? I swear if evil has happened to him in this bad spot, I'll devote the rest of my worthless life to hunting down the authors of that evil." But, as the watcher spoke, the door opposite opened, and a man came forth.

"Ah! it's all right—he's safe! It's Allyne Strathroy!" cried Mordaunt, softly, to himself, as he watched the man who had come from the door, walk briskly down the street. "But what the deuce could have brought him into this locality, and at this hour? There's some mystery about it. To-morrow I'll call upon him. He has a heart!"

Then Mordaunt rose to his feet. His thinly clad limbs were cramped with cold. The door behind him opened suddenly, and a man appeared.

"Vat you vant in mine doorway, eh?" cried the man, in an unmistakable Jewish voice.

"What?" exclaimed Mordaunt, in astonishment—for the voice was well known to him. "Abal Hameleck, or I do forget myself?"

"You know me, eh?" asked the Jew, in astonishment.

"I do!" responded Mordaunt, in a deep, theatrical tone. "Oh, my prophetic soul, my uncle! Three balls! Two to one you don't take out what you put in! Hast thou forgotten the child of genius, Edmund Mordaunt?"

"Why, s'help me if it isn't Mister Mordaunt!" cried the Jew, in delight.

"Yes, what's left of him. Do you live here, 'bally nook'?"

"Yesh."

"What, you live here? you who can buy a square mile of New York!" exclaimed the actor, in wonder.

"Hush!" cried the Jew, nervously. "I ish a poor man, s'help me. Very poor. Vat you do here, eh?"

"Abal, I'm down on my back; 'a ruined man now is Sir Thomas Clifford.' Abal, an hour ago if all New York could have been bought for ten cents, I wouldn't have been able to have bought it."

"Dat ish bad," said the Jew, slowly. "You drink—fool your money away. I remember de fust time you come to mine leetle shop; you pawn your diamonds for five hundred dollars; de last time, I take your boots for twenty-five shents."

"Yes, and it was a quick drop, too, from the diamonds to the boots."

"You ish hard up now, eh?"

"You bet!" replied the actor, laconically.

"You want a place to shleep to-night?"

"Well, I shouldn't object."

"S'help me, I'll do vat ish right. I have a leetle bed; you shall have him. I ish not rich, but poor—very poor."

"Abal, your heart's all right, old boy," cried the actor, touched to the quick by the Jew's offer. "May you never want a friend if ever you get down in the world."

"S'help me, I am an honest man," said the Jew, proudly. "I likes you; you good actor but very foolish young man. You spend monish like water; ah! dat ish bad! I feels sorry for you. I have a leetle room here. I rent it to you eight dollars per month; dat ish dirt sheap; you pays me when you gets ready. I trust you. I ish not a hard man, s'help me."

The vagabond was in luck that night. Two friends had come to his aid. So, with thankfulness in his heart, Mordaunt followed the old Jew into the house.

With quick steps the young man who emerged from the little house into which Allyne Strathroy had gone, a half-hour before, hastened up Baxter street to Bayard, turned into that street, and proceeded onward until he reached the Bowery. On the corner of Bayard street and the Bowery he halted beneath the lamp-post.

By the rays of the gas-light, falling upon his face, we can see that he is deadly pale. Large drops of perspiration are standing upon his forehead, although the air is cold, and the chill night-wind cuts one to the bone.

As the young man stood upon the corner, he staggered against the lamp-post as if overcome by a sudden faintness, and but for the support of the iron pillar he would have fallen.

Then a Third-avenue car approaching, going up-town, the young man hailed it, entered, seated himself in a corner, and the car proceeded on its way.

At Twenty-ninth street the man, whose course we are tracing, alighted and proceeded up the street toward the west.

His feeble, uncertain steps showed that he was in pain. It was confirmed by the pallor of his face. He breathed with difficulty.

Reaching Fifth avenue, he turned into it. Paused before a stately brown-stone mansion. Slowly and with evident pain he ascended the steps. The rays of light thrown out by the street lamps fall upon the silver door-plate, and the name of Allyne Strathroy shines in bold relief.

The young man opened the door by means of a latch-key, and then fell fainting over the threshold.

The noise of the door opening had attracted the attention of some of the inmates of the mansion, and an old gray-headed servant appeared at the head of the stairs. His gaze fell, first upon the opened door, then upon the body of the

young man, stretched, apparently lifeless, across the entry-way.

"Heavens! It is Master Allyne, and dead!" he cried, in dismay, then ran down the stairs.

The outcry of the old servant brought into the hall a terrified group from the parlor, who looked with horror upon the white face of the fainting man.

First came the promised wife of Allyne Strathroy, the beautiful Blanche Maybury, the orphan heiress.

Blanche was indeed a lovely girl. Straight as the chestnut sapling, yet graceful as the swaying willow; lithe in form, supple in motion, she glided, rather than walked. Her form perfection itself; a model for a Venus. Her face a study for the artist who seeks to reproduce upon his canvas the ideal of noble womanhood. Her hair—a dark, rich brown in hue—rippled back in wavy masses—which in the sunlight was tinged here and there with lambent flames of gold—from a low, sweet forehead, pure Greek in its outline. Large brown eyes, clear as the mountain streamlet, lit up the face. Her features were small but exquisitely cut. The small, dimpled chin; the crimson-ported mouth that hid pearly teeth, betraying too in its yielding lines that passion's fires dwelt therein; the cream-colored complexion, hardly the brunette's hue, nor yet the paler of the blonde, but the rose-tint between the two, so seldom seen in human face. All these perfect things made Blanche Maybury's face almost perfection itself.

Behind Blanche came Miss Jennie Strathroy, Allyne's aunt, a lady of uncertain age, but far from being young, as the streaks of gray in her reddish-brown hair could testify. A good-natured, motherly old soul, who had been to young Allyne all that a parent could be, for Agnes Strathroy, the wife of Clinton, and mother of Allyne, had died a few years after her husband's mysterious disappearance; that disappearance we have before spoken of.

"Oh, he is dead!" cried Blanche, with white lips, as she looked upon the face of the man who was dearer to her than all the world beside.

"No, Miss Blanche," replied the old servant—a shrewd, "canny" Scotchman, named Angus Kilmarnock—"he has only fainted."

Then raising the young man as if he had been an infant, in his muscular arms, Angus carried him up-stairs to his own chamber, and laid him upon the bed. The two women followed.

"Had we not better send for a doctor?" asked the old lady, gazing with alarm upon the pale face of her nephew.

"Yes, ma'am, at once," replied Angus. "I will see if I can bring him out of his faint. I'm afraid he has been attacked by some ruffians, as his shirt-bosom is stained with blood."

The doctor was sent for immediately.

Then, warm water and a sponge being brought, Angus proceeded to examine the nature of the young man's wounds. The two ladies retired, their places being supplied by two of the servants, the butler and the coachman.

Carefully they removed the young man's coat and vest. As Angus had said, the bosom of the shirt was stained with blood. The shirt being removed carefully, the old servant washed away the clotted blood and revealed an ugly-looking cut on the left side just above the heart, some three inches in length. But, on examination, Angus found to his astonishment that it was hardly half an inch deep. A mere flesh-wound, nothing more.

With a smothered groan, the young man opened his eyes. A look of astonishment was on his face as he surveyed those around him.

"Where am I?" he muttered, in a low tone, as if in doubt.

"Why, in your own room, Mr. Allyne," said Angus.

"Oh, yes, I see now," said the young man, absently.

"How did this happen, sir?" respectfully said the coachman, who was bursting with curiosity.

"I was attacked by some roughs on the avenue. I suppose they intended to rob me. Luckily I was prepared for them. One of them cut me, though, I think."

"Yes, sir," replied the servant; "but it is not dangerous."

"That is lucky," said the injured man. "I came home at once. I remember opening the door with my latch-key, and then I suppose I fainted, for I can not remember any thing more."

"Yes, sir, I heard you fall in the hall," said Angus.

Then the doctor came—examined the wound—declared

that Mr. Strathroy had a narrow escape—dressed the hurt, and departed.

The wounded man slept but little that night, for dread thoughts were in his mind. And when at last slumber came upon him, his rest was broken by fearful dreams. Again he was in a deadly contest—again he saw stretched upon the floor, with a knife-thrust through his heart, a man whose features strangely resembled his own.

CHAPTER V.

THE MURDERED MAN.

THE morning that succeeded the night on which occurred the events we have related, came clear and bright.

Duke, the Slasher, who had made an appointment to meet Jim Kidd in the morning, in a corner liquor store on Canal street, near Baxter, waited in vain for the young man to come.

At last, growing impatient, Duke determined to go to Kidd's room and see, if possible, what had become of him.

Arriving at the door of the wooden tenement, Duke tried it. The door was open. So, without further ceremony, he entered. He proceeded up-stairs, and opening the door of Kidd's room, walked in. As the shutters were all closed, of course the place was in total darkness.

Duke opened a window, and threw back the shutter, letting a flood of light into the room. Then closing the window he turned. Kidd was lying on the bed, apparently asleep. As Duke advanced to him to wake him, his eyes fell upon a long, glittering knife lying upon the floor. At the sight, Duke started. A feeling of apprehension came upon him. Then he noticed that the face of Kidd was deathly white—that the eyes were open, staring wide.

Quickly the Slasher advanced to the side of the bed. There, a single glance confirmed the suspicion that had entered his mind.

"My God!" he cried, in horror, "he's dead!"

John Duke had spoken but the truth, for the man upon the bed was far beyond mortal aid. A single, straight thrust through the heart had sent him to his long home. No time had been given him for repentance; he had received the dread summons with all his errors fresh upon his head. The slender-bladed knife upon the floor, with the blood still upon it, evidently had been the weapon that had taken the life of the man now lying so still.

"Who could have done this?" cried the Slasher, in wonder. Then he bent over the body, and examined the wound. "A single blow, and that is all," muttered the rough. "He's bled to death, internally."

Such was the truth, for but a few drops of blood had welled forth and stained the linen of the dead man.

"Who could have done this?" again repeated the Slasher, in wonder. "Whoever struck the blow, must have taken Kidd by surprise—perhaps came upon him when he was asleep. Poor Jimmy, how natural he looks!" And the rough for a few moments gazed in silence upon the face of the man who had been his comrade.

"I remember: Jimmy said last night that he expected a visitor. Now, who was that visitor, and did he have any thing to do with this bloody work?"

Then Duke looked around the apartment, seeking some clue to unravel the mystery of the murder. His eyes fell upon something white under the table. Eagerly the Slasher pounced upon it. It was an envelope addressed "Allyne Strathroy, No. 268 Fifth avenue." Duke drew forth the letter contained in the envelope. It read as follows:

"If Mr. Allyne desires to know the fate of his father, who disappeared so mysteriously twenty-two years ago, by calling upon the undersigned at No. 52 Baxter street (near Leonard), on Wednesday evening at nine o'clock, he will be gratified.

(Signed), WILLIAMS."

"That's in Jimmy's own hand-writing, I'm sure," muttered Duke, as he finished reading the letter and replaced it in the envelope. "What little game was Jimmy tryin' to play? Why did he want young Strathroy to come here?"

For a few moments, the Slasher mused over this difficult question.

"Jim Kidd knew nothing 'bout Clinton Strathroy, that I'm sure. What little game was he up to? Did this young fellow come, and did he an' Jimmy have a quarrel, and did he give Kidd that stab?" The Slasher shook his head with a puzzled air.

"No; it ain't possible. Kidd was never killed in a fair fight. Whoever did it, must have struck him when he was asleep. Anyhow, I'll jist hold on to this little document." And Duke put the letter away securely in his pocket. "I'll jist call up and see this Allyne Strathroy. If he had any thing to do with this matter—and I'll charge him with it openly—why, he'll be glad to pay me to keep my mouth shut. I wonder if he looks any thing like his father? It would be a hunky bit of vengeance now, to pay back the son for the wrong the father did my sister! Well, we'll see. Now, I'll jist give the alarm and call in the perlice. Jimmy, old pard," and the Slasher took a long look at the white, silent lips, and wax-like face, "I little thought when I 'lit out' last night, that you were a-goin' to 'pass your checks in' so soon. Won't the boys miss him, though, next election?"

Such was the epitaph of the murdered man.

Duke departed in search of a policeman. The policeman found, he came at once to the scene of the murder, and dispatched a messenger for the coroner.

The news of the murder speedily spread, and a crowd collected around the wooden hovel.

Mordaunt, coming from the hospitable shelter of the Jew's dwelling, was attracted by the crowd. He crossed the street and inquired of a bystander what the matter was.

"A feller murdered," said the man.

"Murdered!" cried the actor, in astonishment. "Where? in this house?" And he pointed to the wooden building that he had so eagerly watched the night before.

"Yes," replied the man.

"Who is it? do you know his name?"

"Yes, Jimmy Kidd."

An intense desire took possession of the actor to see the murdered man. He made known his desire to the short-haired individual who had given him the information.

"Easy 'nuff," responded that worthy. "Jist say you're one of them reporter fellers. Here comes the coroner."

So at the heels of that official, Mordaunt passed up the narrow stairway and entered the room wherein lay the body on the bed, just as it had been discovered by Duke, a half-hour before.

Mordaunt pressed forward with the rest to look at the murdered man's face. As the actor's eyes fell upon the white face, a half-suppressed cry came from his lips. He could hardly believe his senses, *for the face before him, pale in death, was the face of Allyne Strathroy!*

Mordaunt felt as if he was under the influence of some horrible dream. He could hardly believe the reality of what was there before him. He was sure that he had seen young Mr. Strathroy leave the house alive and well on the previous night, and yet, now, he lay silent in the cold embrace of death!

Vainly he asked himself if there was not some horrible mistake. But, no; the more he looked at the face of the dead, the surer he felt that it was the face of Allyne Strathroy. There was the same dark-brown hair, the same olive-tinged skin. There could be no mistake.

But when he heard John Duke, the Slasher, give his testimony, when he heard him declare that the murdered man was called James Kidd, and that he had been with him on the previous night from eight to nine o'clock, he could hardly believe his hearing.

It then was plainly evident that the dead man could not be Allyne Strathroy, and yet, despite the testimony, he it was. *Could there be two men in the world who looked so much alike that one could not be told from the other?* The actor started, trembled violently as a thought flashed through his mind.

He beheld, as by a lightning-flash, the stranger whom he had asked for alms, and who had repulsed him the previous evening—so very like, in voice and person, to Allyne Strathroy. It was plain to him now. He stood by the body of that man, and yet—and yet—he knew not what to think. His eyes said yes—his instincts said no.

The coroner's jury heard all the testimony that was offered—and little enough it was—and returned a verdict that, "the deceased, James Kidd, had met his death by a knife-stab at the hand or hands of parties unknown."

And so James Kidd went to his grave, unwept and unhonored—the mystery of the manner of his death safe in the breast of his destroyer.

Mordaunt went from the moldy-smelling room into the clear sunlight with bewildered senses. He was conscious that he had become entangled in the threads of some dark mystery

Had Fate lured his feet down that street the previous night that he might become linked, in some subtle manner, with the living tragedy?

He gazed at his hands, as if fearing to find upon them the blood-stain; but they were thin and white, and trembled visibly. But, even as he looked, there in the air he saw the image of another hand, as beautiful as his own, but red as blood!

He closed his eyes in dread and fear; and when he looked again it was gone.

"Was it the hallucination of a disordered brain?" he asked, as he walked slowly down the street.

"I shall never believe that I have not looked upon the dead body of Allyne Strathroy until I see Allyne Strathroy living," he muttered, as he walked slowly along.

He drew forth from his pocket the card on which was given the name and residence of the young man.

"I'll go and see this young man, this very afternoon; then my mind will be satisfied." And having come to this conclusion, Mordaunt proceeded to the Bowery in search of a cheap eating-house where he might procure a breakfast.

After the jury had decided upon their verdict, Duke, the Slasher, also sought the street. In his testimony he had not mentioned the letter addressed to Allyne Strathroy and signed Williams, that he had found under the table in the room of the murdered man. He had kept that knowledge to himself.

The canceled stamp upon the envelope showed that the letter had been delivered. Therefore, it was a reasonable supposition that Strathroy, himself, had brought the letter to the room, and accidentally dropped it there.

"Why, if I can only frighten him—if he had any thing to do with it—it will be a small fortune to me," muttered Duke, as he stumbled along.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST BLOW.

ALLYNE's wound troubled him so little that the next morning after he had received it, when Angus came to ask if he would like his breakfast served in his room, he answered in the negative and said he would breakfast with the family.

So, Allyne desired Angus to assist him to dress.

After Allyne had finished dressing he was seized by a sudden fancy.

"Is breakfast ready?" he asked.

"Not quite, sir."

"I wish you would shave me, then; my hand, I fear, is unsteady," Allyne said.

"Certainly, sir," Angus replied.

And so the young man was shaved, and, much to the surprise of the old servant, he had his mustache and imperial taken off, so that his face was as smooth as the face of a young girl.

"It makes you look quite odd, sir," said the servant, after he had finished.

"Do you think so?" Allyne asked, surveying himself in the mirror. And, indeed, it had produced a wondrous change in the appearance of his face, making him look at least five years younger, and quite boyish.

"Yes; at the first glance one would hardly know you," Angus returned; "and you are quite pale, too, which makes you look different."

"Yes; the loss of blood, I suppose," said the young man, carelessly. "I feel quite weak this morning. Let me have your arm in going down-stairs. I may have another fainting-fit."

So, leaning on the arm of Angus, the young man descended to the breakfast-room.

He found his aunt, Miss Strathroy, and Blanche already at table, waiting for him.

"I hope your wound is not severe, Allyne?" said the old lady, looking with some little astonishment at the change in the young man's appearance.

"It is nothing but a scratch," he said, seating himself at the table. "Do you notice the alteration?" he asked.

"Why, Allyne, what possessed you to shave off your mustache?" asked Blanche, in wonder.

"A fancy; that's all," he answered, lightly.

"It makes you look so different, one would hardly know you."

"It is the paleness produced by my wound that alters me so much," he said.

During the breakfast Allyne was silent and abstracted. Both the ladies ascribed his silence to the pain he was suffering; both believing the wound to be much more serious than it was in reality.

After breakfast the three sat in the sunlit sitting-room—Allyne comfortably lounging on a sofa.

"How did you receive your hurt, Allyne?" asked Blanche, her eyes beaming full of sympathy for her intended husband.

"I was attacked by a party of ruffians just as I turned into the avenue. They evidently intended robbery. As I was passing, one of them struck at me with his knife. I perceived the motion and threw my arm up, thus, in a measure, warding off the blow, but the point of the knife cut me. Just as they were about to renew the attack, they heard the rap of a policeman's club, and, taking the alarm, fled."

"What a wonderful escape!" exclaimed the old lady.

The young man told the story of the attack as easily and naturally as possible. His hearers little guessed that they were listening to a fiction, and that no such event had occurred.

Allyne was strangely silent all the morning, contenting himself with merely saying "yes" or "no," and gazing into Blanche's face with an odd, strange, lingering look that she could not understand. Allyne never before had gazed at her in such a way.

After dinner, Allyne was surprised to receive a message that a shabbily-dressed man at the door wished to see him in person, and that he came by appointment.

"Show him into the parlor," said Allyne to the servant, a troubled expression upon his brow. "Tell him that I will see him in a moment."

The servant departed with the message, and the visitor, who was no other than the broken-down actor, Edmund Mordaunt, was shown into the parlor and desired to wait there.

"Ah!" muttered Mordaunt, as he entered the richly-furnished room, "this *is* style. I haven't seen any thing of this sort for some time. Green and gold. Why, there's been money enough spent on this parlor to keep me a year! That's the way the world goes. A tenth part roll in their carriages, while the other nine-tenths slave from morn to night for a crust of bread and a drink of water. 'Oh, that we, the hewers of wood and drawers of water, were swept away, that the proud might learn what this world would be without us.' If these rich men only would give a little of their hoarded store, there would be but little suffering in this world."

Mordaunt sat himself down in a luxuriant arm-chair.

"This is what I call comfortable!" he cried, as he surveyed his surroundings.

Then the door opened, and Allyne Strathroy entered the parlor. Mordaunt rose instantly to his feet and gazed intently upon the pale face of the young man, who had altered so strangely in the single night.

"It is Allyne Strathroy," murmured Mordaunt, to himself, softly, "but, heavens, how changed!"

Allyne on his part made no sign of recognition.

"I believe you stated you came by appointment, sir," the young man said, it apparently costing him a great effort to speak.

Mordaunt started when the tones of the young man's voice fell upon his ear. Evidently something in the voice puzzled him.

"Yes, sir," the actor said; "you remember last night, meeting me on Broadway; you gave me a five-dollar bill and desired me to call upon you to-day. Here's the card you gave me."

Then Allyne seemed to remember, for it was plainly evident that he had forgotten the actor entirely.

"Oh, yes; it was near Leonard street, if I remember," he said, taking the card from Mordaunt's hand and putting it carelessly in his pocket.

"Yes, sir," replied the actor, a bewildered look upon his face.

"I—I met with a slight accident last night," said Allyne, in some little confusion; "it has effected my head a little, I think. You see how pale I am?"

"Yes, you are looking quite ill," replied Mordaunt.

"Let me see; I believe I promised that I would assist you, did I not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I will keep that promise."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," said the broken-down man, in a thoughtful voice. "But, Mr. Strathroy," said Mordaunt, suddenly, "I've something that I think I ought to tell you. It may concern you, sir. It seems like a terrible mystery to me, but perhaps you may know something in regard to the affair that will make it clear to you."

Allyne shot a glance into the speaker's face, quick and penetrating, from beneath his drooping eyelids. Strange, hard lines appeared for an instant about the corners of his handsome mouth; then a look of weariness came on the pale face.

"Be seated, sir," he said, extending his hand to a chair while he sunk into one, himself. "Now, sir, go on."

"If you remember, sir," said Mordaunt, taking the seat indicated by the hand of the young man, but never for a moment removing his eyes from the pale face before him, not an expression of which escaped him, "I asked you last night when we spoke together on Broadway, and you were kind enough to aid me, if you had not passed me about an hour before, dressed roughly in a pea-jacket and a slouched hat?"

"Yes," said Allyne, slowly, "I remember."

"Then I told you that a man had passed me about an hour before that time, dressed as I described, and that that man had your face, your hair, your eyes; in fact, in all but the voice—which was harsher than yours—this man was the very image of you."

"Yes, I remember," again said the young man, without a single sign of emotion upon his face.

"The circumstance puzzled me a great deal," continued Mordaunt, "I could not understand the apprehension of danger that seemed to fill my mind—not of danger to myself, but of danger to you, and coming from this man who bore such a wonderful resemblance to yourself."

Allyne started when these words fell upon his ears. His pale face became still paler, and a livid light shot from his eyes.

"I can not understand this," he said, speaking slowly, and with apparent difficulty.

Not a single change of the young man's face escaped the sunken but inquiring eyes of the actor.

"I went to bed, but in my dreams even, this man and yourself were ever before me," continued Mordaunt. "This morning, on going out, my attention was attracted by a crowd collected around a wooden house opposite. I inquired the reason of the crowd and was told a murder had been committed in the house."

"Ah!" slowly came the exclamation from the pallid lips of the young man, and he fixed his eyes upon the face of the actor with a searching intensity.

"Excited by a curiosity that I could neither account for nor restrain, I entered the house and looked upon the features of the dead man. He had been killed by a single knife-stab through the heart. A single wound only. Judge of my astonishment, when I looked upon that man's face, rigid in death, to behold your features, your exact counterpart!"

"It is very strange," said Allyne, slowly, a strong glare now settling in his eyes.

"Yes, I would have taken my oath that this man was you. In fact, I could not believe that you were living until I saw you," said Mordaunt, impressively.

"It is probably but one of those incomprehensible coincidences that sometimes occur in the world—an accidental resemblance, that is all," replied Allyne, with a gleam under his half-shut eyelids, that made his eyes look like steel.

For a moment, Mordaunt gazed into those eyes; that moment's gaze served to seal a horrible suspicion in the mind of the actor. Once more that scarlet hand flashed up in the air, midway between the two men, and in the eyes of Allyne the actor saw a demon's glare.

The actor closed his lids as if to shut out a horrifying sight. When he gazed again the Phantom Hand was gone.

"Can you guess a solution to this riddle?" Allyne asked, slowly and carelessly.

"I am not good at guessing," said Mordaunt, dropping his gaze to the floor, for he felt that his eyes were betraying him.

For a moment Allyne looked upon him as if endeavoring to read his soul in his face.

CHAPTER VII.

GUARDING AGAINST DANGER.

"As I have said, it is merely a coincidence—a remarkable one, truly, but still, nothing more," Allyne continued, in the same calm tone that he had used during the whole interview.

"I thought it but right that you should know of it," observed Mordaunt, who knew but too well that he had made a foe of the man before him by making the disclosure that he had. And yet, what reason had Allyne Strathroy either to hate or fear him? There was but one answer; and that single answer told of a scarlet crime and a scarlet hand.

"You have acted rightly," said Allyne; "I shall not forget your kindness."

There was a tone of bitterness—nay, of menace in the young man's voice that made a cold shiver creep over Mordaunt.

"Now, let me see what I can do for you. You are in want. Suppose I give you a hundred dollars; will that relieve you?" Allyne asked.

"I should not ask you for such a sum as that," the actor said, in wonder at the young man's liberality, and yet with an unpleasant suspicion that it concealed some subtle purpose.

"I shall give it to you without asking," Allyne said, with a smile. It was the first that had appeared on his pale face during the interview. "Wait here for a moment, please, and I will get the money," continued the young man. Then he rose and left the room.

Mordaunt's brain was in a whirl. He could not understand this strange entanglement which seemed to be winding itself more and more around him.

If the horrible suspicion that had entered his mind in regard to Allyne Strathroy had even a shadow of truth, was it not his duty to denounce him to justice, instead of accepting his bounty? But then the actor thought of the odds against him. How could he *prove* his suspicion to be well founded? This man was rich; he, the accuser, was poor. That gold was an irresistible agent for either aiding or defeating justice in New York, the shrewd man of the world well knew.

Then another question presented itself. Possibly this hundred dollars was intended for a bribe to keep him from looking deeper into this mysterious affair?

The return of Allyne, after some ten minutes' absence, put an end to the reflections of the visitor.

"Here is a hundred dollars," said Allyne, handing two fifty-dollar bills to Mordaunt. "Use this money prudently and it will give you a start in the world again and relieve you from the disagreeable necessity of asking aid from any one."

The tone of the young man was so candid—his manner so generous and open-hearted, that for a moment, all the suspicions of Mordaunt vanished. He felt as if he had been under the influence of a horrible dream.

The poor broken-down wreck of a man could hardly stammer out his thanks at this generous liberality.

"Oh, don't speak of it," said the young man, in a careless, off-hand way; "you may be able to repay me some day." Then casting a glance in the face of the other, he noticed how worn and haggard it looked.

"Take a glass of wine before you go," he said, kindly. And without waiting for a reply he went into the entry, and in a moment returned with a little tray containing two wine-glasses brimming full of rich, fruity port.

The grateful incense of the rare old wine commended itself swiftly to the always thirsty throat of him who had wrecked his life by drink.

Allyne sat the tray down on the center-table, and pushed one of the glasses toward Mordaunt, while he took the other.

"Drink to your better fortune," he said, gayly. The actor did not wait for a second bidding, but eagerly drained the glass.

There was a gleam on the face of Allyne as he watched the actor gulp down the wine at a single swallow.

"When you need assistance come to me again," Allyne said as Mordaunt departed. The voice rung like a note of mockery in the ears of the departing man.

Mordaunt went down the avenue, turned into Twenty-sixth street and walked toward Third avenue, which he intended to follow down town.

"I am sorely puzzled," he murmured, as he walked onward. "Can I suspect a man who treats me like a brother?"

Then Mordaunt began to have a queer sensation about the head.

"I have been drinking bad whisky so long that this pure, rich wine affects me strangely."

And as he walked on, his head became worse and worse. It swam round like a top, and, by the time he had reached Third avenue, he was reeling like a drunken man.

"Oh, heaven!" cried the actor, in dismay, and feeling deathly sick, "what is the matter with me? I can not be drunk on a single glass of wine. My throat is on fire. I am burning up inside!"

Mordaunt staggered to a door-stoop, and fell rather than sat down upon it. Burning fires were in every vein; his strength seemed gone; weird images floated before his eyes; cold drops of perspiration rolled from his fevered brow.

"Oh!" he groaned in anguish, "I am dying—dying like a dog in the streets. Oh, my God! have mercy on me!" he almost shrieked, as the death-pangs racked and tore him.

"Say, cap, what's the matter?" asked a rough, honest voice, close to the elbow of the sick man.

The voice came from a street vender, who, walking along beside his cart, bawling, "Pe-ta-ters, here yer are!" at the top of his voice, had noticed the ailing man upon the stoop.

Pony Moore—such was the name of the street vender, given him probably on account of his stunted figure, that made up in breadth what it lacked in size—was a thorough New York "boy"—a representative of a great class peculiar to New York city, who are known under the general name of licensed venders, and who travel about the city with a wagon more or less dilapidated, drawn by some wretched specimen of horse-flesh generally, and sell anything in the way of fruit or vegetables on which they can make a living profit.

Pony was a good-hearted fellow, despite his looks, for he resembled a prize-fighter, with his jet-black hair cropped tight to his head, his bristling mustache of the same hue as his hair, and his complexion that resembled a raw beefsteak. His attention had been attracted by the agony exhibited upon the face of the unfortunate actor.

"Say, cap, are you sick? Whoa, January!" This last remark was addressed to the animal who drew the wagon of the vender, and who showed a disposition to go on without waiting for his master—a proceeding that aroused the ire of that worthy.

"I am very sick," murmured the actor, in great pain. "I feel as if I were burning up inside."

"Let me run you into this *shot-i-cary-pop* an' let him p'ison yer," said the kind-hearted Pony, assisting the actor to his feet. A druggist-shop was but two doors above.

"Say, January, jist you keep quiet, 'cos I'll walk into yer affections lively if you don't! Jist hold on to me, cap," said Pony, after delivering the parting injunction to his horse.

The street vender conducted the almost helpless man into the druggist-shop.

Luckily for Mordaunt the druggist was also a doctor, and he was at home. To him the suffering man explained his symptoms. Mordaunt, each moment, seemed to be getting worse and worse.

The doctor guessed from the actor's description of his pains the nature of his illness.

First he employed that admirable instrument known as a stomach-pump. Then he prepared a dose of sweet oil, which he made Mordaunt swallow.

"How do you feel now?" he asked, after the actor had taken the oil.

"Oh, much better; the pain is nearly all gone."

"You had a lively shake of it, cap," said Pony, who stood an attentive observer of the scene.

"What could have caused this sudden attack?" Mordaunt asked, in wonder.

"You have been drinking to excess lately, have you not?" said the doctor, his experienced eye reading the truth in the haggard face of the actor.

"Yes; but this morning I have taken nothing but a glass of wine—a single glass only."

"Indeed, only a single glass of wine?" said the doctor, thoughtfully.

"That is all."

"Come this way a moment, please," said the doctor, drawing Mordaunt into the little room at the back of the shop.

"You have not been under the influence of liquor then, to-day?" the doctor asked.

"No," Mordaunt said, in some astonishment at the doctor's question.

"You have not tried to poison yourself, then?"

"No," replied the actor, utterly astonished; "why, do you mean to say—"

"That you have been poisoned, yes," said the doctor. "I thought when you came in, and I discovered what the matter was with you, that, in a drunken spree, you had taken poison."

"No, no, it is not so," returned Mordaunt, utterly bewildered at this strange discovery.

"Then you have in some way taken poison. If my guess is right, you have been a very hard drinker?"

"Yes, yes."

"That you have drank hard has probably saved your life, for your system being impregnated with the poison of the alcohol, the poison that you have recently taken could not act upon it in its full force. One poison counteracted the other in a measure. But if you had not acted so promptly in coming to me, and applying a remedy, you would have been beyond all earthly aid in an hour."

Then to the mind of Mordaunt came the thought that the poison, that had so nearly taken his life, must have been in the glass of wine that he drank at the house of Allyne Strathroy.

Why should Allyne Strathroy desire the death of one so powerless as the vagabond actor?

There was but one answer:

Fear!

Fear of what? The body of the murdered man in Baxter street could have answered that!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GIRL THAT RUNS THE SEWING-MACHINE.

MORDAUNT left the druggist's shop with his head filled with confused but horrible ideas. He was firmly convinced that Allyne had poisoned him. He had escaped death by a miracle, and, rising with the crisis, his old manhood reasserted itself, and the now thoroughly aroused man swore that he would devote the rest of his life to unavailing the dread mystery that shrouded the relations which had existed between the person known as James Kidd, who had been murdered in Baxter street, and Allyne Strathroy.

Pony Moore, the street vender, had followed Mordaunt into the street.

"Well, cap, are you all hunky boy, now?" he asked.

"Yes, my good friend," said the actor, feeling a deep sentiment of gratitude toward the man who had taken pity upon his helpless condition.

"Well, now that's jist bully. That doctor cuss is jist an 'old blue-bird on a lily-root,' as we used to say down South during the war!" exclaimed Pony, in admiration.

"Were you in the army?"

"You kin jist go your pile on that every time. I was a Zou-zou. First Fire Zouaves. No *fou-fous* in that crowd!" replied Pony, with honest pride. "Say, cap, don't I know you?" And Pony looked keenly into the face of the actor as he put the question.

"Not to my knowledge," said Mordaunt, unable to remember ever having met his companion before.

"Ain't you an actor? Didn't you play a star engagement at the New Bowery The-a-ter onc't?"

"Yes," said the actor, and back to his memory came the thoughts of bygone years; those years when he was a spoiled favorite of the public, and received hundreds of dollars weekly. He had changed greatly since that time.

"Edmund Mordaunt's your name, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"I knowed it was you!" cried Pony, in delight. "Whoa, January!" he shouted, as his sagacious animal, seeing him come from the shop, had commenced to move slowly down the street.

"I see'd you play Macbeth for your benefit. Cris and I went into the boxes. Cris is my sister. Say, Mister Mordaunt, you look kinder hard up," said the street vender, casting his eyes upon the shabby suit that the actor wore; "things are rough with you, eh?"

"Yes, but it's my own fault," returned the actor, sadly.

"Well, now, I'd jist go my bottom dollar for to see you on top of a stage ag'in. You know how to howl, you do! Why, them fellers nowadays ain't a patch alongside of the

old sports. New York ain't what it used to be. It's a moved up-town or over to Brooklyn, or gone out into Jersey," said Pony, with an air of disgust.

The actor listened to the reflections of the street vender very thoughtfully. Even while the good-hearted fellow was scheming for Mordaunt's stage resurrection, the other was scheming for his own deeper eclipse. That poisoned draught had fired the slumbering lion in his nature, which never before was so fully aroused; and already, even as Pony Moore chattered, the actor had determined upon his plan of action to clear away the mystery that surrounded Allyne Strathroy and his connection with the Baxter street victim, Kidd. Some obscure and quiet retreat was requisite; possibly, an active and daring ally. The room in the old Jew's house in Baxter street might answer for the first, but if he could also procure another refuge it would be to his advantage, for Mordaunt now felt sure that he had a powerful and unscrupulous foe to contend with, when he entered the lists with Allyne Strathroy. The ally could be found in the street vender, and perhaps he could direct him to some quiet boarding-house near where he resided.

"You have not told me your name yet," observed Mordaunt.

"Moore—Pony Moore," said the street vender.

"Where do you live?"

"In Rivington street, near the Bowery. It's a tumble-down-looking old shanty on the outside, but pretty as a picture on the inside," said Pony.

"Do you know of a very nice, quiet boarding-house, near you—one cheap, because I'm not over-flush with money?" asked Mordaunt.

For a moment Pony scratched the side of his head reflectively—a sign in him of deep thought.

"Well," he said, at length, "I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Mordaunt, we've got a spare room; 'tain't a very large one, but it's snug, an' if you'd like to come an' stop with us—Cris and I—why, you kin pay jist what you think it's worth."

Eagerly Mordaunt embraced the offer. It suited his purpose admirably.

"Jist git onto the cart an' ride right along," said Pony. "I'm goin' straight home. The folks up here don't know what cheap 'taters are. You see, my reg'lar beat's on the east side, from the Bowery down to the river. But, as I had a lot of 'taters on hand, I thought I'd skirmish up here. It's a mean beat; they ain't got no rocks."

So Mordaunt and Pony got on the wagon, and, urged by the voice of the street vender, "January" began to make good time homeward, while Pony enlarged upon the good qualities of the sorry-looking steed.

Pony explained to his companion as they rode along that his sister, Crissie Moore, or, as he termed her, Cris—was a shirt-maker for one of the large Broadway firms, but worked at home instead of going to a shop. Pony, evidently, thought a great deal of her.

"She's jist the nicest little gal you ever *did* see," he informed his companion, in confidence, as they proceeded down-town, "an' she's jist as smart as they make 'em. Why, a steel-trap's a fool to her. You would never think that she was my sister, for to look at me, 'cos I'm rather a rough and tumble looking cuss, but she's jist as neat as a pink. You ought for to see her when she's fixed up to go to Jones' Wood, or over to Hoboken on a Fourth of July, or some sich day. She looks jist as gay as a humming-bird. She's a good girl, too," and Pony spoke with pride. "You don't catch her runnin' round the streets with a lot of young fellers. She's jist as much of a lady as any of them painted-up gals, with hoss-tails on the back of their heads, that cut sich an awful swell on Broadway. Why, if I should ketch Cris daubing any of that white and red on her face, I'd jist put her head in the water-pail, quicker'n a wink. But, she wouldn't do any sich thing as that; she knows better, *she* does!"

"I suppose that she'll be getting married soon," said Mordaunt, merely by way of keeping up the conversation.

"Well, I don't know," said Pony, dubiously. "She's the queerest little coon about that that you ever did see. Why, there's a feller that I used to know'd when I ran with 41, 'way 'fore the war—that's when 41 lay down round Clinton street, you know."

Mordaunt nodded his head, as much as to say that he knew all about "41."

"He was a butcher-boy down at Washington Market. He was as nice a feller as you ever see'd, and he wasn't

afraid of any man of his weight in New York. You ought for to see him put his hands up with the gloves on. He was a hummer, now I tell yer. Well, I took him up to the house, but Cris didn't cotton to him, at all. He was jist dead gone on her, but it wasn't no use. I tell yer, he thought a heap on her—his name was Billy Meeder; p'haps you know him," said Pony, suddenly winding up his eulogium on his friend.

Mordaunt said that he had never met Mr. William Meeder, but that he should be pleased to make his acquaintance.

"He's a hunky boy, now I tell yer; an' he jist loved the very ground that Cris walked on, I do believe. Why, he told me onc't that he'd lick any man that looked crossways at Cris, if he were big as a house, an' I know he'd tried fur to do it."

"Then your sister didn't encourage the attentions of this friend of yours?" Mordaunt said.

"Nary bit!" returned Pony, emphatically. "He wasn't her style. She's got a mind of her own, now I tell yer."

In due time the two reached the little two-story wooden house on Rivington street, where the street vender lived.

As he explained to the actor, he had the upper part of the house, while another family occupied the lower floor. Families in New York are herded together in narrow quarters, like so many cattle. No wonder that the mortality list of the great city is large.

Pony ushered Mordaunt into the little front room, where-in sat his sister, Cris—busy at work at her sewing-machine—with great ceremony.

"This is Mr. Mordaunt, Crissie," he said, with a flourish of his great brawny hand, that looked like a small-sized shoulder of mutton; "you remember how we used to see him act at the New Bowery afore it burnt down."

Crissie rose to her feet in some little confusion as her brother introduced the actor.

The actor was still a gentleman, though he and fortune had long since shaken hands and parted company; so, gracefully and with easy politeness, he expressed the pleasure it gave him to make the acquaintance of Miss Moore.

Crissie Moore did not belie her brother's praise. She was a little woman; possibly three and twenty, although being so small in stature, she looked like a mere girl. Her merry blue eyes were as quick and piercing as the eyes of a bird. The mass of hair that crowned her shapely little head was of a strange hue, not yelow, nor yet gold, but of an odd, unusual tint between the two. She could not be called beautiful, for her nose was too large and the contour of her face too sharp. Her lips were red and perfect in their form. The complexion pure, white and red; Nature's handiwork, not Art's. The little lithe figure perfect in its outline, and the pure white brow was purity itself.

There was a little of the vixen, something of the coquette, and a great deal of the true woman—the latter tempered the two first—about Crissie Moore.

"Cris, I've spoken to Mister Mordaunt about taking our little front room," said Pony, in his blunt, honest way.

"I should be very much pleased to make one of your household, Miss Moore," said Mordaunt, in the powerful, sweet-toned voice, that so often, in the days gone by, had thrilled like liquid music through the hearts of the audience. "That is," he added, "if it will not put you to too much trouble."

"Oh, no, sir," said Crissie, quickly. With the quick instinct of woman, she had read the history of the once popular actor, in his shabby garb and in the deep lines that dissipation and want had stamped upon his face; the proud face that had once been so handsome in its manly beauty.

And so Mordaunt became a member of Pony Moore's household.

The children of toil have far more pity in their hearts for the unfortunate than the wealthy denizens of the great city.

Crissie Moore took a far deeper interest in the pale-faced wanderer than she had ever felt for any one before. Pity filled her heart; in time, that might become something else.

CHAPTER IX.

BLANCHE MAYBURY ASTONISHES LAWYER CHUBBET.

In a cosy office, situated in a handsome brown-stone front building, on lower Broadway, sat lawyer Chubbet.

Lysander Chubbet was not a young man; far from it. His hair was silvery gray, so also were the side-whiskers,

worn "mutton-chop" shape, in the English style, which fringed his fat face. He was slightly bald, and the short hair on either side of the head stuck out, instead of lying smoothly down. This peculiarity gave him the appearance of wearing a hood of gray over his head, which was still further increased by his silver gray whiskers.

The lawyer was a portly man in form. A sleek and placid look was upon his face. The small bluish-gray eyes had a shrewd and cunning expression.

Lysander Chubbet had never particularly distinguished himself at the bar. Indeed it was whispered that all his efforts that way when a young lawyer had been signal failures. Yet Chubbet was a prosperous lawyer; had grown very wealthy by his profession, although having an ample fortune left him by his father to start on, his enemies had said that that fact was not to be wondered at.

But Chubbet was a good lawyer in some respects. Property intrusted to his hands dwindled down amazingly, yet no one could say that lawyer Chubbet had acted dishonestly in the premises.

One anxious set of heirs, whose property had been intrusted to Lysander Chubbet's hands to settle, and who after long delay had received but fifty thousand dollars, where they had expected a hundred, at the least, had said—speaking as with one voice—that lawyer Chubbet properly should be called lawyer Grab-it.

Lysander merely smiled when this was repeated to him—caressed his double chin with his smooth white hand, and said in his usual calm, sedative voice:

"Young people will have their joke. It is not my fault if the law is expensive."

And so Lysander Chubbet waxed fat and rich, wore the finest of broadcloth—the whitest of linen—went to church regularly on Sundays; omitted none of the usual forms to make his neighbors believe that he was not only a wealthy but a good man, for Lysander Chubbet had a high respect for the world's opinion.

And yet, in spite of all this good behavior—this wearing the livery of heaven to serve the devil in—some men said openly and without fear, that lawyer Chubbet "was an infernal old scoundrel."

But all men are villified. The tongue of scandal in this world spares no one.

Mr. Chubbet had been a college chum of Eben Maybury—Blanche's father—and on his death, when his will was produced, it was found that Mr. Chubbet had been appointed guardian of Blanche and the sole executor of the will.

Thus it is, in his relation to Blanche, that Lysander Chubbet is necessarily brought into our story.

It is some four days after the one on which the interview took place between Allyne Strathroy and the vagabond actor, that we visit Lysander Chubbet in his office.

The lawyer was seated in an easy chair, gazing out, lazily, upon the crowded street beneath him.

A gentle knock resounded upon the door of the lawyer's office.

"Come in," said the lawyer, hardly turning his head, as he did not expect any special visitor. Judge of the lawyer's astonishment when Blanche Maybury entered the apartment.

She was habited in a dark walking-dress, and a little bow of magenta at the neck shone like a blaze of fire on the dark surface.

The lawyer instantly rose, and with that fatherly politeness that formed his chief stock in trade, offered the young lady a chair.

"I am truly rejoiced, my dear Miss Blanche, to see you in my dull office this morning. Your sweet presence lends a charm unto the scene which—" and here the lawyer paused; it was a habit of his to commence a quotation and to forget the end.

Blanche seemed ill at ease. It was evident from the expression upon her face that she had something upon her mind.

The shrewd eyes of the lawyer saw by the look upon the face of the young girl that something was the matter, and inwardly he speculated as to what it was.

"Mr. Chubbet, you are my guardian," said Blanche, so abruptly that it made the old lawyer start.

"Yes, my dear," he said, recovering from the surprise occasioned by the suddenness of the remark, "as you have said, I am your guardian: and I trust that I may be allowed to take this opportunity to remark that it is at once a

pleasure—I may say a happiness—I hope I may not be considered as putting it too strong, when I say, it is a joyful happiness to be your guardian; to ‘lead your tender feet in pleasant paths to stray to’—ah—hum!” and the speaker, forgetting the end as usual, wound up his speech with a graceful wave of his fat white hand.

“You know all about my father’s will,” said Blanche, with a troubled air.

The lawyer started; the mention of the will did not please him.

“Ah, yes—of course,” he said, after a moment’s pause, as if he had been considering what to say. “I suppose that I may say without fear of contradiction, that I do know all about your father’s will, my dear.” Then, in an undertone, he muttered to himself, while his shrewd little eyes watched the flushed face of the young girl anxiously, “What the deuce is she driving at?”

“I was quite a child when my father died, if you remember—” she said, with some hesitation.

“Yes, my dear, I do remember. You were a ‘lovely flower born to blush unseen—’ No! no! I—ah, well. As I was saying, you were a child.” And the lawyer, smiling benignantly upon the fair girl before him, looked like a great ape; the gray hood of hair giving him that expression.

“And, of course,” she said, continuing her speech, “I do not remember exactly how my father’s will read.”

“Of course—it is natural,” said Chubbet, with another beaming smile, although in his heart he did not like the way the conversation was tending, for he hadn’t an idea where it might end.

“There are one or two points in my father’s will upon which I want information,” said Blanche, speaking with an effort, and a deep blush overspreading her face.

Chubbet opened his little eyes in wonder. He was getting more and more astonished.

“My dear young lady,” he said, in his smoothest and softest tone, although he was far from being pleased, “I am perfectly familiar with your father’s will. I think I can give you any information you desire in regard to it.”

For a few moments Blanche was silent. She was evidently considering what to say. The old lawyer watched her with growing uneasiness.

“If I remember right,” said Blanche, at length, “my father’s property is held in trust by you, for me, until I reach my twenty-first year.”

“Yes, my dear,” said Chubbet, with a bland smile, “and I assure you that I have taken the greatest care of that trust. It has been sacred to me,” and here the lawyer laid his hand upon his heart. “It has been as sacred as—well, as any thing that ought to be sacred. If you would like to look over the books and see how I have invested your funds—”

“Oh, no!” cried Blanche, quickly.

The lawyer felt relieved. He was afraid that his accounts were to be examined, and though he had them in splendid shape and not to be easily questioned, still he was a little nervous and really feared the examination of Blanche more than he would that of a dozen lawyers.

“Is there any further information?” he inquired.

“Yes,” Blanche answered, after a moment’s pause. “If I remember rightly, you are to remain my guardian until my twenty-first year; then I am to have my property—” and the girl paused.

“On one condition,” said Chubbet, in his usual mild tone, finishing Blanche’s speech.

“And that is?” Blanche put the question, although she knew what the answer would be.

“That you marry Allyne Strathroy,” said the lawyer. “Your father and Allyne’s were boys together. It was the great desire of his life that when you grew old enough, you should marry the son of his lifelong friend. That is the reason that that clause was inserted in the will. Your father knew that young ladies sometimes take strange fancies, and he resolved, if possible, to insure your marriage with Allyne.”

“But, supposing that, from any cause whatsoever, I can not fulfill my part of the contract,” said Blanche, slowly, “supposing that I should refuse to marry Mr. Allyne Strathroy?”

The lawyer started in amazement. He could hardly believe his ears. He knew very well that Blanche and Allyne were devoted lovers. The strange words of the young girl astonished him. What could they mean?

“But, my dear,” he said, after he had in a measure, re-

covered from his amazement, “there are really no grounds for supposing any such thing. It is altogether improbable.”

“But, supposing such a thing should happen,” said the young girl, “what then?”

“Why, in the event of your refusing to carry out your father’s behest, all the estate goes to found a public library in the city of New York. But, my dear child, why do you put such questions?” asked Chubbet, his curiosity excited by the strange conduct of the young girl.

Blanche did not seem to heed his question.

“Then, if I refuse to marry Allyne Strathroy, I am a beggar,” the girl said, slowly.

“Well—that is—yes—yes, if you put it that way,” said Chubbet, who couldn’t make head or tail of the girl’s strange questions. “But there’s no danger of that, I know, my dear,” he continued. “It will be a regular love-match. I am sure I never saw two young people that seemed so devoted to each other.”

“Do you think so?” said Blanche, with a tinge of bitterness in her voice. “Yet, while I live, I will never be the wife of Allyne Strathroy.”

CHAPTER X.

BLANCHE’S REASON.

THE lawyer gazed at the fair young girl with open mouth, and in a state of complete astonishment. Recovering at length from his surprise, he spoke:

“My dear Miss Blanche, is it possible?—that is, did I understand you rightly?—did you say that you can never be—” and the lawyer paused.

“That I can never be the wife of Allyne Strathroy?” said Blanche, taking up the unfinished sentence and completing it; “yes, that’s what I said.”

Again the lawyer surveyed his fair client with an air of bewilderment.

“But, really,” he said, “this is so unexpected—so totally unlooked for. As your guardian, my dear child, may I take the liberty of asking what is the reason of this strange determination?”

“I can not tell you,” replied Blanche, quietly.

“Oh!” Lawyer Chubbet was puzzled. He stroked his double-chin; pulled first one whisker and then the other. But, it was all in vain; no relief came to his bewildered brain.

“But, really, Miss Blanche, you must allow me to say that this determination of yours is a most extraordinary one. You and Allyne always seemed to be very fond of one another. In fact, I do not think I am putting it too strong, when I say you were devoted lovers.”

“Yes,” responded Blanche, a slight crimson hue mantling her white temples, “we *were* in love with each other, I do not deny it.”

“*Were!*” exclaimed Chubbet, still more astonished. “*Were!*” he repeated; “do you mean to affirm that such a state of affairs no longer exists?”

“I do,” replied Blanche, simply and honestly.

“But the reason,” persisted the lawyer; “have you and Allyne quarreled?”

“No!” responded the girl.

“No? But I do not understand.”

“Neither do I,” sighed Blanche.

“What?” Chubbet, before astonished, was now literally confounded.

“My dear Miss Blanche,” said the old lawyer, as soon as he could collect his thoughts and recover from the astonishment into which he had been thrown, “are you in possession of your senses?”

“I think I am,” replied Blanche, with a quiet smile.

“But, really, I do not understand this in the least,” said the puzzled lawyer. “You and Allyne have been from childhood together; it has always been understood that you and he were to be married. You never before have evinced any disinclination to the match; yet now you come, without warning, without apparently any good reason—I trust I am not putting it too strong when I say without any reason whatever—and inform me that you can never be Allyne’s wife. My dear Miss Blanche, you have always appeared to me to be a young lady of great natural common sense; in fact, a superior young lady, and I must say this determination of yours surprises me—in fact, not to put too fine a point upon it, it astounds me; I am bewildered—in a maze. If you

and Allyne had quarreled—as lovers will quarrel—I could understand this sudden change in your mind; but you say no quarrel has occurred.”

Lawyer Chubbet, having “summed up” his case, leaned back in his chair and looked “owly.” It was a strong point with the lawyer when he was perplexed and had nothing to say, to assume an air of profound wisdom, which impressed those that didn’t know him with the idea that he *could* say a great deal if he only *would*.

Chubbet was not the first man in the world who had a reputation for wisdom by simply keeping the mouth shut!

“Mr. Chubbet, I will explain the reason that has prompted me to come here this morning and tell you what I have told you in regard to Allyne Strathroy, as well as I can,” said Blanche, after a moment’s hesitation, in a low, sweet voice that showed but little trace of embarrassment.

“Proceed, my dear Miss Blanche; I am all attention,” exclaimed Chubbet, looking more “owly,” and more like a great monkey than ever.

“Of course, I am well aware that it was always understood that I was to marry Allyne, and I confess—freely confess, that I *have* loved him. But, my feelings toward Allyne have changed. There was a time when it made me happy to be even in his presence, but now I can not bear to look upon him. I know that I am acting wrong, for I have promised Allyne to be his wife—have told him that I loved him. It was the truth then, but it is the truth no longer, for I loathe and fear him.”

“My dear child, this is but a girlish fancy,” said Chubbet, in his bland way; “you will get over it in time, and then you will love Allyne as well as ever.”

“No, no!” cried Blanche, impulsively, “I will *never* get over it. I feel it—I know it! I will not go to the altar with a lie upon my lips. I will not swear to love the man that I feel, in my heart, I detest. I will not wreck my happiness forever. You are my guardian; I have no father—no parent—I come to you with this load upon my heart, and ask you to relieve me from it.”

Blanche’s impulsive speech startled the old lawyer. He saw, with all his blindness, that the young girl was terribly in earnest.

“How long is it since you first thought that your feelings had begun to change toward him?” asked the perplexed lawyer.

“Two days ago,” answered Blanche.

“Only two days ago?”

“Yes. I struggled against the feeling at first, thinking it was a mere fancy, but I soon became convinced that my affection for him had indeed changed.” Blanche spoke with deep feeling. “I thought it better that you should know all. That is the reason that brought me here to-day.”

“My dear Miss Blanche, I really don’t know what to say. This disclosure will be a terrible one for Mr. Allyne to listen to. Don’t you think, my dear, that if you were to wait a month or two, you would get over this aversion toward Mr. Strathroy, and that the old love would come back?” said the lawyer, insinuatingly.

“No, no!” answered Blanche, quickly. “I can never again love Allyne Strathroy!”

“But, my dear child, I am afraid if you refuse to marry Allyne Strathroy that your fortune is in danger, for the will of your father expressly provides, that, if you refuse to marry Allyne, you shall not inherit the property.”

“Well, I would rather be penniless than to marry a man that I cannot love,” said Blanche, spiritedly.

The lawyer was amazed. He would do almost any thing for money. That Blanche should throw a fortune away for a foolish whim, was something to be wondered at.

“I wish you would see Mr. Allyne, and tell him all. Do not conceal one bit of the truth. I would rather seem—what he will think me—a heartless, changeable coquette, than wantonly deceive him by accepting the love I cannot return.” This she said, rising.

“Very well, my dear, I will do as you wish, but you can not conceive the pain it gives me”—here Chubbet put his hand on his heart, and looked sentimental—“when I think that I shall not have the pleasure of seeing two young hearts—”

“Thank you, Mr. Chubbet,” said Blanche, interrupting. “If he could only know how sadly I feel about it, I am sure that he will not think me heartless.” Then the fair girl swept daintily out of the room.

The lawyer sat down to his desk and wrote a short note to Allyne Strathroy. This finished, he meditated:

“Of all the incomprehensible things in this world, a young and pretty woman is the most puzzling,” he muttered.

Chubbet was not the first man who had arrived at that conclusion.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW YORK JUSTICE.

BLANCHE, when she descended the stairs that led from the lawyer’s office to Broadway, felt that a weight had been taken from her mind.

In the street she decided to walk up-town instead of riding, for it was bright and pleasant in the sunshine, and the air felt refreshing.

In crossing Broadway, just at the corner of Fulton street, Blanche was nearly run down by a recklessly-driven express-wagon, the driver of which was possessed of the usual idea, common to all drivers, that pedestrians have no business in the streets.

Blanche was rescued from her perilous position by a young man who was crossing the street with a lady at the same time, and who, addressing the express-driver in language decidedly more emphatic than complimentary, desired him to “pull up,” to which the express-driver indignantly rejoined by telling the young man to go to a very warm region, and there was a lively prospect for a row, for the young fellow that rescued Blanche evidently was not to be bullied. But the approach of the tall, good-looking policeman on duty at the corner, and who escorts ladies across the closely-jammed thoroughfare so gallantly, put a stop to it.

The Metropolitan, having witnessed the episode, told the reckless driver, in *courtly* language, his opinion of him—and of his entire family, including his employers also in the opinion; and informed the aforesaid driver that it would give him—the policeman—great satisfaction “to knock the stuffin’ out of him”—of course, in the line of duty.”

The expressman drove on in great wrath, and the row subsided. The Metropolitan merely expressing his hope to the bystanders, that he should have to “take that young feller in some time.”

Blanche, safe on the pavement, turned to thank the gentleman who had assisted her, when she was suddenly recognized by the lady that was with him.

“Blanche!” cried the stranger, in delight.

“Margaret!” exclaimed our heroine, recognizing in the young lady a school-mate.

Of course, two pretty pairs of lips pressed each other instantly; while the young man stood by and looked on, no doubt with a wish in his heart to take his sister’s place.

Margaret Osmond had become a room-mate of Blanche’s at boarding-school, and of course was delighted to meet her now.

“Why, Margaret, what are you doing in New York?” asked Blanche.

“Oh, I live here now; we have moved on from Philadelphia. Leonard has just been admitted to the bar here. Oh, I forgot; you don’t know Leonard,” and then she introduced the young man. “My brother Leonard, Miss Maybury.”

Leonard Osmond was a good-looking young fellow of four and twenty. Dark hair and eyes; a firm, resolute face, and a well built, sinewy form.

Then the three walked up Broadway together.

The two girls had much to say to each other, for they had not met for some time.

The Osmonds were living in Twentieth street, on the west side of town. As Margaret had said, the young man had just been admitted to the bar, and had commenced practice as junior partner with two old friends of his father.

With a promise to call on each other and renew the old friendship of their school days, the girls parted at Canal street, Margaret and her brother turning down Canal, while Blanche kept on up Broadway.

“What do you think of her?” asked Margaret, of her brother, after they had parted from Blanche, “isn’t she real sweet?”

“Oh, she’s a nice girl enough,” replied Leonard, carelessly; “looks as proud as the deuce, though.”

“She isn’t a bit proud!” responded Margaret, warmly; “she’s perfectly splendid!”

"That's what you say of every thing," retorted Leonard, laughing; "it don't matter what it is, from a poodle dog up to your dearest friend."

Leaving the two to pursue their way, as their further conversation does not particularly pertain unto our story, we will return to the actor, Mordaunt, whom we left comfortably quartered in the house of the street-vender, Pony Moore.

Three days had wrought quite a change in the appearance of the outcast. He now looked like a different man. He had purchased a plain, gray suit, some new shirts, a hat and a pair of shoes. Attired in these he looked quite respectable.

The actor during the three days had thought long and earnestly as to what course of action he should pursue in regard to the man known as Allyne Strathroy. He was now convinced that his suspicion in regard to that man was correct, although it was a monstrous one in its nature. He was convinced, too, that this man had guessed that he was suspected, else why should he have tried to take the life of the poor wretch who had never harmed him; and who—setting the facts of the suspicion aside—was not likely to cross his path in any way whatsoever?

At last Mordaunt decided upon the course that he ought to pursue. And in that course the first thing for him to do, was to call upon the detective officers and make known to them the suspicion that had entered his mind.

So on the very same day that Blanche Maybury called upon Lawyer Chubbet and astonished him with the intelligence that she had resolved not to marry Allyne Strathroy, Edmund Mordaunt called at the central police office and asked to see a detective officer upon important business.

After considerable delay he was ushered into the presence of Captain Richard Doe, the only detective officer that happened to be in at the time.

Captain Doe was a tall and portly man, with a yellow beard, a big nose and a loud voice. An awe-inspiring man, and he evidently was well aware of that fact, for as Mordaunt entered, he turned his eyes upon him, and in a loud voice demanded:

"Well, what is it?"

The posture of the officer was particularly graceful. He sat in an arm-chair tilted back on its hind legs, and one of his enormous feet rested on the table. On the entrance of the actor he had been amusing himself by vigorously whistling "Shoo Fly," with variations. He was evidently disturbed by the entrance of the actor.

"I should like to see the gentleman in charge of the detective department," said the actor, who was not favorably impressed with the appearance of the officer before him.

"Well, I suppose I'm the man—or I'll do at any rate," said the officer, after a pause, during which he had surveyed Mordaunt from head to foot, as if he had been a tailor taking his measure.

"There was a murder committed in Baxter street some four months ago—" began Mordaunt.

"Tell me something I don't know," said the worthy officer, with a grin.

The actor was a little astonished at this manner of doing business; but he continued:

"I think I have a clue to the murderer."

"Ah!" figuratively speaking, the detective pricked up his ears.

"Yes," repeated Mordaunt, "I think I have a clue to the man who did the deed."

"Oh!" the detective rubbed his hands softly together for a moment. "What reward is offered?"

"Eh?" Mordaunt didn't exactly understand what the officer meant by the question.

"I mean," explained that worthy gentleman, "what reward is offered for the apprehension of the criminal?"

"Well, none, that I'm aware of," replied the actor. The detective looked disgusted.

"What's the name of the man who was murdered?" he asked.

"James Kidd."

The officer opened a drawer in the table and took a folded paper from it. Then he opened the paper and glanced over it. It was a list of names; opposite to each name were set sums ranging from five hundred dollars to five thousand. Between the names and the sums came what were evidently remarks; such as, "Highway Robbery," "Assault," "Bond Robbery," "Murder," "Arson," "Bank Robbery." And astonishing to relate, the names opposite to which was

placed "Bond Robbery" outnumbered the others two to one; and scratched in with a lead pencil after these names was the significant sentence, "compromise if possible."

"Kidd—Kidd; I don't see any such name here," the officer muttered, running his eye down the list.

"A list of the murders committed in New York lately?" said Mordaunt, referring to the paper.

"Not much!" returned the detective, emphatically. "It's a list of the fellers that are 'wanted' and rewards are offered for."

"I am pretty sure that there has not been a reward offered in this case that I speak about," said the actor.

"No reward offered?" and the tone of the officer indicated surprise in the extreme.

"No."

Then the detective surveyed Mordaunt with a look that said, plainly, "What the duce do you want here?"

"No re-ward!" said the officer, reflectively. "Well, if you know the man that committed the murder, just go to the nearest police justice, give in your evidence, and get a warrant for the arrest of the criminal." And then the officer commenced on "Shoo Fly" again, softly.

"Oh, but stop!" cried Mordaunt. "I haven't evidence enough to warrant my swearing against this man. I've only a clue, and that but a slight one, but I thought if I came here—"

"That we'd 'shadow' this man and find out whether your little suspic' was O. K. or not, eh?" said the detective, pausing again in the midst of the entrancing "Shoo Fly."

"Yes, that is exactly what I thought," said the actor, glad to be understood.

"Well, some folks have queer ideas," said the officer, in a meditative way. "Just look at that, will you?" And he took from the drawer a book containing pasted scraps, evidently cut from newspapers. Each scrap was an account of a murder, the perpetrator of which was unknown. "That's this month, so far; about one a day. Suppose we should waste our time a-trying to hunt 'em up"—the officer evidently meant the murderers—"how much time would we have for attending to the fellers that there's big money out for, say?"

Mordaunt could make no reply to this knotty question.

"If there's a reward offered and you've got a clue to work on, why you kin come an' 'see me.'" And then the officer again plunged into the mysteries of "Shoo Fly," while the actor left the temple of justice with a clearer idea of the way they manage some things in New York than he had ever had before.

CHAPTER XII.

A DISCOVERY AND A COMPACT.

MORDAUNT saw clearly that he had little aid to expect from the detective police in his mission of vengeance.

"I must depend upon myself to hunt this man down, then," he muttered, as he came out of the police station. "Be it so; I accept the task, and to it I will devote the rest of my life."

The actor walked onward toward Broadway, busy in thought. He had a difficult task before him; he was well aware of it, and yet he did not shrink from it. All the better energies of his nature, dormant through long years of dissipation, were now roused into action.

By the time Mordaunt reached Broadway he had decided upon the course to pursue.

"First, to discover if my suspicion is correct," he said, as he walked along, careless of the busy, moving crowd that jostled him on either side. "That will be difficult. If I were better acquainted with him—but, still, if he can blind the eyes even of his own relatives how can I hope to detect him?" This was a difficult question to answer. "But they have no suspicions, while I have. That makes a wondrous difference. I saw him but for a few minutes that night on Broadway, and I was not half myself at the time. The next day he was on his guard against me; I could see it plainly. He fears me or else he would not have tried to kill me. He has no reason to fear me, except the bare suspicion that I know or guess his secret. His action then is plain proof to me that my suspicion is correct—that he has a secret and that I have guessed it—guessed it almost by instinct. He has dealt the first blow in the war that it seems we are fated to engage in. The next blow may come from me."

With these thoughts in his mind Mordaunt walked slowly on up Broadway.

As the actor crossed Prince street, a man, seated in a handsome green coupe pinked out with scarlet, was being driven down Broadway. He passed Prince street just as the actor stepped from the curbstone into the street. The man in the carriage caught a view of his face. The sight seemed to stun him, for, with a bitter oath, he sunk back in the carriage, white with fear and anger.

The actor passed on, unconscious of the effect that the sight of his face had produced upon the man in the carriage.

"It is he!" cried Allyne Strathroy, in wrath, for the man in the coupe, who had been so agitated by the sight of the actor's face, was no other than Allyne Strathroy. "He is living!" muttered the young man, through his white lips. "How has he escaped me? Does he bear a charmed life—has poison no effect upon him? Oh!" and Strathroy groaned in anguish as he brought his clenched hands together; the nails driven into the white skin told his deep emotion.

"I have a presentiment that this man is fated to bring me to an account for that night's dark work. Have I dared all, gained all to be detected even in the hour of victory? It must not be—it shall not be. Since my hands have failed, I will try the hands of others. There are plenty of tools to be found in this great hot-bed of crime. There's many a man in the 'bloody Sixth ward' that would not hesitate to take a life for a five dollar bill. I must find some one of these fellows and put him on the track of this man that like an avenging angel has risen, as it were from the grave, to strike me. Either he or me. My life or his. I accept the situation. I have gone so far and now I can not retreat, and I would not if I could. My hand already is scarlet with blood; the hue can not be deeper."

Strathroy had just determined upon the course that he should pursue in regard to Mordaunt, when his carriage halted before the door of lawyer Chubbet's office.

Chubbet had dispatched his note to Allyne requesting an interview upon important business, immediately after Blanche had departed, and as the note seemed urgent, Allyne came down at once.

Allyne ascended the stairs that led to the lawyer's office, knocked at the door, then entered.

"Why, my dear Mr. Strathroy!" exclaimed the lawyer, rising in haste to receive his visitor, "how you have altered. Why, what have you done to yourself?"

"Merely shaved, that is all," replied Allyne; "besides I have not been well lately. I was attacked on the avenue the other night by a gang of ruffians and received a severe cut from a knife in the hands of one of them. I lost considerable blood, although the wound was not dangerous; it has made me look paler than usual. Do you think I have changed much?"

"Well, at the first glance, I certainly thought that you had altered a great deal; but now that I come to look closely at you, I don't see that you have altered particularly. Removing your mustache makes you look a little different," replied the lawyer.

"Yes, it does change me somewhat!"

"Sit down, Mr. Strathroy," and the lawyer pushed a chair toward the young man; "of course you received my note?"

"Yes," replied the young man, seating himself, "and I came down immediately, as you requested."

"Of course, Mr. Strathroy, I do not suppose that you have the slightest idea why I wish to see you?" said the old lawyer, smiling blandly.

"No, I have not," answered Allyne.

"Ah, well," and Mr. Chubbet shook his head in a sagacious way; "it is in regard to Miss Maybury."

"Blanche!" cried Allyne, starting.

"Yes, to Blanche. Of course you are aware it has always been supposed that yourself and Miss Blanche would some day become man and wife?"

"Supposed!" exclaimed Allyne, quickly. "I was not aware that there was any supposition about the affair. Blanche and I love each other. She has promised to become my wife."

"Yes, I always supposed so—not to put a fine point upon it, I know so. But, my dear boy, human life is uncertain. We never know what is going to happen to us; if we did, the probabilities are that it wouldn't happen." And then Mr. Chubbet looked "owly."

"What do you mean?" questioned Allyne.

"I mean, my dear young friend, that you must prepare yourself for the worst. As the poet says, 'screw your courage

up to the'—what-d'ye call-it, point," said Chubbet, looking sagacious.

"Mr. Chubbet, once more I beg you to explain," exclaimed Allyne, impatiently.

"My dear Mr. Strathroy, as I said before, prepare yourself—brace yourself for a sudden shock." Then the lawyer leaned over toward Strathroy and whispered mysteriously. "It can't be!"

"What can't be?"

"Your marriage with Miss Blanche."

"Why not?" demanded Allyne, in consternation.

"Woman is a lovely creature," said the lawyer, reflectively; "she is also extremely uncertain in her mind. You never can tell when she will or when she won't. She claims as her privilege the right to change her mind often. To do her full justice, she fully exercises that privilege, not to put a fine point on it. 'Oh, frailty, thy name is woman,' and things in this world are extremely uncertain."

"But what has this to do with my marriage with Miss Blanche Maybury?" asked Allyne, impulsively.

"Simply that that lovely girl has only thought proper to exercise her sex's privilege and change her mind."

"In regard to what?"

"Her engagement with you."

"Impossible!"

"My dear Mr. Strathroy, I hope you not call my word in question?" And Chubbet drew himself up and looked dignified.

"No, no, of course not!" exclaimed Allyne; "but this that you tell me seems so unaccountable—so unreasonable."

"My dear boy, don't mention reason and a woman in the same breath; the two things are totally incompatible." Lawyer Chubbet was a bachelor.

"But when did you learn this?" asked Allyne, who was unable as yet to believe that he had heard aright.

"This morning," replied the lawyer. "Miss Maybury called here and requested me to tell you what I have just told you."

"That she wishes the engagement existing between us to be broken off?"

"Exactly; that is precisely what she wants," replied the lawyer.

"But did she not give a reason for this strange proceeding?" asked Allyne, in wonder.

"Oh, yes; a woman's reason: 'because.' She said that her feelings toward you had changed. That she felt that she did not love you, and of course could not marry you. I endeavored to remonstrate with her, but she was firm as a rock. You know how obstinate women are sometimes."

"This is very sudden," said Allyne, thoughtfully, and half to himself.

"Of course!" exclaimed the lawyer; "that's just what I told the young lady, but I might as well have talked to a post for all the good it did. You know what the poet says about women? 'O women, in our hour of ease, uncertain'—and deuced hard to please, etc., etc.; you know the rest," which was more than Chubbet did.

"Did she say when she first discovered that her feelings had changed toward me?" Allyne asked, a strange suspicion beginning to enter his mind.

"Yes, I think she did mention it," replied the lawyer, thoughtfully. "If I remember right, she said that she discovered it about three days ago."

Allyne started.

Can a messenger from the dead have whispered in her ear and told her of my crime? Such was the thought that with the speed of the lightning flashed through the mind of the young man.

"It is very mysterious," said the lawyer.

"And very painful to me," observed Allyne, with a thoughtful brow.

"Of course! of course!" repeated Chubbet.

"I have set my heart upon making Blanche my wife. I know that she does love me, despite this strange whim of hers. You are well aware, Mr. Chubbet, that young girl's in this world are not always the best judges of what is good for them?"

"Ex-actly!" said the lawyer, with a wise shake of the head.

Mr. Chubbet, you are Blanche's legal guardian. If you should insist upon her fulfilling her contract with me, I do not see how she can avoid complying with your will. I am aware that it would be an insult to offer a man like yourself a bribe." The lawyer bowed at the compliment, but there was a shrewd twinkle in his little eyes.

"I would not for a moment think of doing such a thing," continued Allyne; "but the day I marry Blanche Maybury, I shall be pleased to put a check for five thousand dollars into your hand, the moment the ceremony is ended."

"Ah—hum—you are a noble young man, Mr. Allyne," said Chubbet. "I admire your principles. You have taken the right estimate of my character. I am not to be bribed, but—would you have any objection to give me a little memorandum regarding the five thousand dollars you mention, and I will try to *persuade* Miss Blanche to fulfill her promise."

The memorandum was given and received.

Allyne Strathroy had calculated shrewdly.

Lysander Chubbet was not to be bribed, but five thousand dollars bought him, body and soul.

Poor Blanche had little idea of what was in store for her. She had little suspicion that the man she once loved so well—Allyne Strathroy—was not willing to give her up. That he was determined that she should be his wife, if not by fair means, then by foul. If not by her free consent, then by force.

Blanche was right. Allyne Strathroy had changed greatly. Who could tell what had caused that change? One man only; and that man was the broken-down actor, Allyne Strathroy's deadly foe.

CHAPTER XIII.

CRISSIE'S IDEAL.

As Mordaunt walked slowly up Broadway, his mind busy in thought, a gentleman came out of the Metropolitan Hotel and accosted him.

The actor, raising his eyes, beheld Mr. Harry Piner, one of the leading theatrical managers of the metropolis. He was a short, stout gentleman, with a fat, good natured-looking face, and a long yellow mustache.

"Hello, Mordaunt!" he cried, addressing the actor; "where in the world did you come from?"

"From the poor-house," answered the actor, shortly.

"Oh, nonsense; I know better than that by your looks. Why, I haven't seen you looking so well for a year. I say, Mordaunt, have you given up drinking?" asked the manager.

"Well, for a time I have; or I'm trying to," responded Mordaunt. "I haven't drank to excess for about a week. I'm trying hard to be a decent man once more."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Piner, in his quick, impulsive way; "if you could only keep straight now for a week or so—"

"Why for a week?" asked the actor.

"Well, I've got an English star—a lady; plays the Paulines, the Juliets, and all that sort of thing. She opens next Monday, and I want somebody to 'do' the Romeos and the Claudes; how 'll that suit you?"

"Excellent," replied the actor, glad of a chance to put some money in his pocket, for he knew full well that to battle with Allyne Strathroy, he needed all the capital he could command. Money is the sinew of war. Little hope for success is there without it.

"The fact is, Mordaunt," continued the manager, "I am a *leelle* doubtful about my fair Englishwoman—by the way, she isn't particularly fair, and that's what I am afraid of. All the English importations have been such failures lately, that our American public are getting into the idea that we really have better artists at home than any that come from abroad. Now you used to be a local favorite in New York. I think if we make a feature of you—engaged expressly to support the great actress, etc., you understand—if she happens to make a failure, why your old prestige may carry us over the week."

"Well, how about terms?"

"What do you want?"

"Make me an offer?"

"How will fifty be for the week?"

"Not enough," answered the actor, decidedly. "Why you know I once got a hundred and fifty per week for a regular season."

"Yes, I know, my boy, but that was in war times," returned the manager.

"Why, confound it, you expect my old favoritism is going to pull you through the week without loss, and you offer me a paltry fifty, while you probably give this star—that you feel pretty sure is going to be a failure—a hundred a night," said Mordaunt, warmly.

"Oh, no I don't," returned the manager. "I'm not so foolish as that. She shares after twenty-five hundred for the week. Come, I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll give you seventy-five."

"But hold on a moment," said Mordaunt; "I haven't any wardrobe now."

"Oh, my prophetic soul, my uncle!" cried the manager, theatrically. "Well, you can hire the dresses easy enough of a costumer."

"Yes, but that costs money."

"Well, I'll be generous," replied the manager, after a moment's reflection. "I'll give you seventy-five and pay for the hire of the wardrobe. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes," returned the actor, and so the affair was settled.

"Seventy-five dollars; that will keep me some time," calculated the actor, after he had parted from the bustling manager. "With what I have left out of the hundred, it's a small fortune, if I use it rightly. It seems like retribution for this Allyne Strathroy to give me money which I shall use in my effort to give him to the scaffold."

Then Mordaunt proceeded homeward, and delighted the Moore household with the intelligence that he was going to appear on the stage once more.

Crissie Moore had taken a great liking to the man whose life had been saddened by his own mad acts; yet, even to herself, she did not confess that liking.

She was ever on the alert to please him. She seemed to guess his wishes before he expressed them.

Mordaunt, in his stormy career in the world, had met many a girl who fancied herself in love with the handsome actor, and many whom he had thought himself in love with. But the actor had never met his "fate." Love after love had filled his heart—such as they were—and yet passed away without leaving any lasting impression. But now there was something about this little sprite of a girl, who worked hard all day long for the bread she eat and the clothes she wore, that pleased him. She was so quick, so bright in all she did. The actor sat and watched her at her work and all the while thought her more of a humming-bird than a human.

Crissie Moore was far from being perfection either. She had a temper of her own, and did not hesitate to show it.

Mordaunt began to consider as to the truth of the old saying, that it was not good for man to be alone, and could not help putting the question to himself if he would not be happier if he had a nice little wife to care for him—some heart that would love him above all the world beside. And when he thought of that little wife, the face of little dainty Crissie Moore—crowned by the yellow hair, that looked golden in the sunshine—rose before him. The blue eyes, that shone so keen and bright, danced merrily before his vision; and often he caught himself, like the German lover, wishing "that it might be."

"You are going to play again!" Crissie said. Dinner was over, and the young girl—her dishes washed and the room swept up—had resumed her usual seat at the sewing-machine, her bread-winner.

"Yes; you are coming to see me?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered; "but I think I shall, though I don't go to amusements very often."

"Why not?" he asked; "don't you like amusements?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, quickly, "but amusements cost money, and I don't have a great deal to spend. It takes too much to live nowadays."

"Why, you are quite a prudent little body," he said, laughing; "what a nice little wife you will make for somebody, one of these days!"

"Yes, when that somebody gets me," laughed the girl.

"Why, you don't surely intend to be an old maid, do you?" he asked, watching the pretty little head, bent so steadily over her work.

"I don't know," she said; "that depends a great deal upon somebody else. Unless some nice young man comes along and asks me to have him, how can I help myself?"

"And is that all you are waiting for—for some one to ask you?"

"Why, how on earth can I be married without? You wouldn't have me walk up to a young man and say, 'I want to be married; please, sir, will *you* have me?' Do you think that would be proper?"

"Decidedly not!" cried Mordaunt. "But it seems then that it doesn't make any difference to you who the young man is, eh?"

"I didn't say that," replied Crissie, quickly.

"No, but that is what you mean, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't! Don't you suppose I've got eyes? I wouldn't have everybody," and Crissie looked disdainful. "I know I'm only a poor girl, and I work hard all day long, but I know what kind of a lover I want as well as if I lived up on the avenue, and had lots of money."

"Well, what kind of a lover do you want?" asked the actor, feeling a slight interest in the subject.

"I will tell you: my lover must have nice black hair, and it must be curly, and he must have black eyes—or eyes that look like black a little way off. Then he must be a gentleman, and he must have plenty of money, and he must think that I'm just the nicest little girl that there is in all the world. He must love me better than he does any thing else, and he must pet me and take good care of me and—well, I believe that's all."

"Don't you think that possibly it will be a long time before any such person as you describe will come along?" asked Mordaunt.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Crissie, with a bright smile.

"I suppose that I can wait. I'm in no hurry. I sha'n't be an old maid for a few years yet."

"But what are you going to give in exchange for all these virtues that the 'coming man' must have?" asked the actor.

"A pearl of great price," replied Crissie, demurely.

"And that is?"

"Myself, of course," said Crissie, with another one of her winning smiles. "And just think what a nice little wife I shall make! I shall love my husband—when I get one—so much. I shall try and do every thing that I can in the world to make him happy. I shall put him on a great pedestal, just like a statue, in my heart, and only take him down to kiss him."

"But, supposing a man should come without possessing all these things that you describe, would you reject his love? Suppose his hair was black and didn't curl?"

"Oh, I must have curly hair and it *must* be black."

"Well, suppose we throw aside—what? What shall we throw aside? Which one of all the attributes that you have stated that your ideal *must* possess can you best do without?"

"Well, I don't know," said the girl, thoughtfully. "Suppose you name them over, then I can tell you."

"Very well. To commence, then: black eyes—"

"Or eyes that look like black," interrupted Crissie, stealing a shy glance at the actor's face.

"Or eyes that look like black," repeated the actor.

"Curly black hair. To be very fond of you. To love you better than any thing else in the world. To be kind to you. To be a gentleman, and—well, I believe that's all."

"I can't do without any of those," said Crissie, with a toss of her shapely little head. "Wasn't there any thing else?"

"No—yes. He must have plenty of money."

"Well, I think that if I must give up any thing, that I can get along with a *little* money." Crissie was describing her lover in sober earnest.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOVE AND FEAR.

BLANCHE MAYBURY sat in the parlor of the Strathroy mansion. 'Twas early evening. The gas had just been lighted.

Blanche sat by the window looking listlessly out upon the darkness of the avenue, which was lit up here and there by the lights flashing from the windows of the brown-stone palaces.

It was the evening of the day that she had called upon Mr. Chubbet, her guardian, and made known to him her strange determination respecting Allyne Strathroy.

Blanche did not feel in a pleasant mood. It was a terrible struggle to tear from her heart the image of the man that had once been enshrined there; but she felt that she did not love him, and though it cost her many a bitter pang, yet she had resolved to do what she believed to be her duty.

Gloomy were her thoughts as she gazed out on the broad street before her. She expected a bitter—an unpleasant interview with Allyne, when he should learn the truth, and she was nerving herself to meet the trial.

"Musing alone, Blanche?" said a deep voice at her side. Startled for a moment, for she had not heard any one enter the parlor, she turned her head and beheld Allyne Strathroy standing by her side.

There was a look upon the face of the man who had once been so dear to her that she did not like. It was a threatening look. She had never seen Allyne Strathroy look so before. Her heart told her that the interview that she so dreaded was at hand, and the strange expression upon Allyne's face told her also that it would be far from being a pleasant one.

"I did not hear you come in," she said, looking up in his face.

"Am I the less welcome on that account?" he asked, leaning on the back of the cushioned arm-chair in which she sat, and looking down into her face with a gleam in his eyes that chilled her to the heart, although his glance was one of fire.

"No, of course not," she replied, answering the odd question that he had asked.

"Blanche, what were you thinking of when I entered the room?" he said.

"Why—of—of a great many things," she replied, with hesitation. "Why do you ask?"

"Because from the expression upon your face when I came in, I should judge that your thoughts were not pleasant ones."

Blanche could not understand the strange feeling that came over her now in Allyne Strathroy's presence. His voice—the voice whose rich tones were once so pleasant to her ear—now filled her soul with a strange apprehension of danger. She could assign no reason for this change. She could only feel it, without being able to explain why or wherefore.

"How strangely you speak, Allyne," she said, after a few minutes of silence, feeling that she should say something.

"I do not speak as strangely as you act, Blanche," he replied.

The painful interview was coming, and yet now that she could not avoid it, her heart sunk within her and she would have given almost any thing to escape, and this, too, after bravely making up her mind to encounter it.

"Blanche," he continued, finding that she did not reply, "I have seen Mr. Chubbet, your guardian. He told me the particulars of an interview between you and himself this morning. I would not have believed such an interview could have taken place, had I not his word for it. Blanche, what have I ever done to you that you should break your faith with me?" The tone of Allyne was deep and strong, but more full of angry passion than of sorrowful emotion.

"Nothing." The word came slowly from the lips of the fair girl, who bent her head and did not, seemingly, dare to encounter the look of the young man.

"Ah, nothing," he repeated; "and for *nothing* you break your word! You plunge me down into utter misery. You take away from me all that makes life joyful—yourself, and all for—*nothing*." Bitter indeed was his tone. "Blanche, I thought better of you. I did not think that you would treat me this way. If you could give me a reason for this sudden change, I should not blame you so much. But you have no reason."

"Yes, yes, I have!" she exclaimed, feeling that his words were unjust.

"And what is that reason?" he demanded, earnestly looking into her face, which now was uplifted to meet his eyes.

"I do not love you!" she answered, firmly.

"You have never loved me," he cried, in heat.

"Allyne, you do not speak the truth," she exclaimed, all the woman in her nature roused by his words. "You know that I have loved you, and if I love you no longer, it is your fault and not mine."

"What do you mean?" asked the young man, a frown clouding up his brow.

"That you have changed," replied the girl, firmly. "You are not the Allyne that I gave my love to. You have deceived me, and now that I have discovered the truth, which is best—to confess it frankly as I have confessed, or to deceive you with a lie? To say that I love you with my lips, when in my heart I fear you?"

"You fear me?" said Allyne, apparently astounded by her words. "What have I ever done that you should fear me?"

"I can not tell," said Blanche, in despair; "that is why I am so miserable. My heart tells me that I fear you, and yet I can not give a reason for it."

"This is but a girlish fancy!" exclaimed Strathroy.

"No, no, Allyne, it is not!" cried Blanche, while, in spite of her efforts, the tears came slowly into her eyes. "Oh, Allyne, do not blame me for acting as I have; rather pity me; for, oh! you can not guess how wretched this knowledge has made me. Only one little week ago, I looked forward to the

day when I should call you husband, with eagerness and joy. But now, I would rather go into my grave than be your wife."

The poor girl showed her distress plainly, both in her face and voice, and yet Allyne Strathroy did not seem to be affected by it.

"Blanche, you are a foolish child," he said, impatiently. "You have allowed a wicked fancy to sway your better judgment. You will change again, possibly, as suddenly and with as little reason as you have changed this time. Then you will beg me to forget this scene; to forget your foolish words."

"No, Allyne," answered Blanche, decidedly. "I am not acting foolishly, nor am I yielding to any sudden fancy. At first I thought it was a fancy and strove to cast it off, but the effort was useless. I can not give a reason for acting this way, it is true; neither can I give a reason for shrinking when I see a snake; it is but fear—instinctive fear."

"And do you have the same fear of me that you have of a snake?" he asked, with bitterness in his voice.

"Not exactly the same, of course," she replied, "but it is like that feeling. I can not explain it any better, but I shrink from you without knowing why."

"So you would have all at an end between us?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, firmly; "all is at an end between us. I have told you the reasons as well as I can, that urges me to this step; and, Allyne, do not think harshly of me, for the parting gives me as much pain as it can possibly give you."

"I should be very foolish indeed if I allowed you to persevere in this foolish whim," said the young man, firmly.

"Why, Allyne, what do you mean?" asked Blanche, in wonder.

"Simply that, if for the moment you are mad, I am not," replied Strathroy.

"Oh, Allyne, do not speak so cruelly!" cried Blanche, in anguish.

"Blanche, you have given me your promise to become my wife, have you not?" demanded Strathroy.

"Yes," replied Blanche, unable as yet to guess the drift of the question.

"And you wish to be released from that promise?"

"Yes; it is my duty, now that I know the truth, to ask for that release."

"Blanche, you are my promised wife, and while I live, I will never release you," Allyne Strathroy spoke firmly.

"But, Allyne, you can not mean—" cried Blanche, in wonder.

"To hold you to your promise? But I do, though. I will not let you make wretched both your own life and mine by this thoughtless act," replied Allyne.

"And you are willing to marry a woman who tells you that she can not love you?" questioned Blanche, a red flush sweeping over her face.

"Yes," said Allyne, firmly.

"Who tells you that she fears you almost as she fears a serpent?"

"Yes," again repeated Strathroy.

"Allyne Strathroy, you have changed indeed." Blanche could hardly believe what she had heard.

"Yes, I have changed, and you are the cause of that change. Blanche, I will never resign you."

"Allyne, I never expected to hear you speak like this. You are not the Allyne I loved, and I will never be your wife of my own free will. Let me pass."

Then, with a queenly step, she left the room. Allyne did not offer to detain her.

"Blanche, you can not escape me!" he said, fiercely, sinking into a chair with an angry glare in his dark eyes.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE TRAIL.

"SHE is fully in my power," mused Allyne, as he took the seat by the window wherein Blanche had sat. "How can she escape me? The five thousand dollars will make old Chubbet do my will. I read his character at the first glance—the infernal old scoundrel. If he can not persuade or force Blanche to become my wife, some other means must be used!" For a moment Allyne pondered over the question. "I have it!" he exclaimed, at last. "I can find a minister somewhere, who, for a good round sum, will not be particular whether the young lady says 'yes' or 'no' when we stand

up before him. I will make the girl mine if I am sure of sinking to hell's fires the moment afterward!"

Then Allyne thought over the interview that had taken place between Blanche and himself.

"There seems to be a special Providence in this strange dislike that the girl has taken to me," he muttered; "she can not understand the reason, but I can, though, and I do not wonder at it. Some persons laugh at presentiments; I do not. I am convinced that there is something within our natures—some mysterious and unknown power, that the eye of science has not yet reached or even guessed at—that warns us of coming evil. This girl hates me, whom she used to love, warned by that mysterious power. I hate this man—this outcast wretch, whose name even I do not know—but whom I feel—warned by this same power—is either destined to kill me or I him. Once already I have failed. And now how can I discover him, discover where he has his den, that again I may seek and strike him—again stain my hands scarlet in blood?"

A ring of the door-bell interrupted Allyne's meditations. Glancing through the window, which commanded a view of the front steps, he saw a tall figure dressed in black standing there. The figure was not familiar to the young man.

"What does he want, I wonder?" he said to himself.

A few moments after one of the servants, who had answered the bell, came into the room.

"What is it, Williams?" Allyne asked.

"It's an old gentleman, sir, who says he used to know your father—would like to see you, if you are disengaged," said the servant.

"Show him in here; I'll see him."

Allyne Strathroy had a strange curiosity regarding the father that had so mysteriously disappeared twenty-two years before.

The servant conducted the gentleman into the parlor.

Allyne beheld a man, apparently about sixty years of age, clad in an old-fashioned black suit. His hair was iron-gray and cut quite close to the head. His face was smoothly shaven; and was lit up by a pair of keen, grayish-black eyes.

The moment Allyne beheld him he was seized with the impression that he had seen the man somewhere before, but where or when he could not remember, although he racked his brains to do so.

"Mr. Allyne Strathroy, I presume, sir," said the stranger, after the servant had left the room.

Allyne gave a slight start when the tones of the stranger's voice fell upon his hearing. The voice, too, was familiar. The circumstance puzzled the young man. The keen eyes of the stranger noticed the movement on the part of Allyne, slight as it was.

There was nothing in the stranger's voice to excite attention. He spoke in a low, monotonous tone, with a slight degree of harshness—such a voice as might belong to either a country schoolmaster or minister.

"Yes, sir," replied Allyne. "I am Allyne Strathroy."

"I am truly proud to make your acquaintance, sir," said the stranger, with an angular bow. "Allow me to introduce myself, Obadiah Howard, from Unionville, Cattaraugus county, New York."

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. Howard; be seated," said Allyne.

"Thank you; you are extremely good," and Mr. Howard sat down.

"I think you mentioned that you were acquainted with my father," the young man said.

"Yes, I have that honor, and how is your worthy father?" the stranger asked.

"How? Is it possible that you do not know that my father disappeared some twenty-two years ago, and has never been heard of since?" Allyne asked, in astonishment.

"Oh, I do remember, 'pears to me," said the stranger, in some little confusion. "The fact is, Mr. Strathroy, I have not seen your father for nigh onto twenty-five years. He was up our way one summer and he stopped a spell at our house, and invited me to call upon him if I ever came to New York; and so, as I got down here now, I thought I'd just drop in and return the visit."

There was something so ludicrous in the idea of a man letting twenty-five years elapse before returning a call, that Allyne could hardly help smiling.

"I was a-teaching school when your father was up our way; but now I'm an editor. Editor of the Unionville Bugle. I've come down to New York for to make a book. I'm going to show up this awful city, as it ought to be shown up,

sir, in all its wickedness and sin. And, sir, I thought, considering that I knew your father, that perhaps you wouldn't mind to assist me a little in my object."

Allyne had anticipated that the old friend of his father would want assistance.

"Well, Mr. Howard, I don't really know how I can be of any service to you," Allyne said.

"I will explain, sir," said the editor. "In my book, which I am a-going to bring out, I intend to tell the truth about the sin and iniquity of this modern Sodom; and I reasonably suppose, sir, that people will not be apt to believe, sir, that I have really been here, and seen with my own eyes what I am a-going to write about. So I have prepared a little certificate which I intend to publish as a sort of an introduction to my book; proving that I have composed my book on the spot here, sir, right in the midst of all the wickedness that I am a-going to write about."

Then Mr. Howard drew a sheet of paper from his pocket-book, and read aloud:

"New York City.

"We, the undersigned, hereby certify that we have seen Mr. Obadiah Howard, editor of the *Weekly Unionville Bugle*, Cattaraugus County, State of New York, in our city, collecting materials for his book upon the great metropolis of America as it is."

"There, sir," said Mr. Howard, after he had finished reading: "if you will give me your signature at the bottom of this, I shall think it a great favor, sir. I intend to get the signatures of the chief of police, the mayor of the city, and other men in high offices, but I thought that I would fare better with them if I got some one who knew me to sign it first."

"Oh, certainly. I have no objection to sign it," said Allyne, glad to get rid of his tiresome visitor so easily.

So Allyne rung for pen and ink. But, as the young man put his hand upon the pen to sign, a sudden thought seemed to strike him. For a moment he looked suspiciously at the editor, Mr. Howard; but that gentleman was caressing his chin, seeming in great delight at having succeeded so well in his mission.

"Pshaw! I'm a fool," muttered Allyne to himself as he commenced to sign.

The young man wrote his signature on the page slowly, and evidently with difficulty.

"I sprained my wrist a few nights ago," he exclaimed, "and it is difficult for me to hold a pen, much less write with my accustomed ease."

The keen eyes of Mr. Obadiah Howard had flashed fire under their long lashes, when they beheld the apparently stiff hand of the young man trace "Allyne Strathroy" across the page. It was with delight no doubt at having succeeded.

"I am very much obliged," said the editor, carefully restoring the paper to his pocket-book.

"Oh, don't mention it."

The editor rose to depart.

"This is a great city," he said, in a mournful voice.

"The things they do here are awful. The other day, a-gathering materials for my book, I walked into a house which had a crowd around it, and I found there a man stabbed right through the heart, and nobody knew who did it."

"Yes, such things are common in our city," said Allyne.

Mr. Howard had reached the door, but turned as he opened it.

"Yes, they are very common. This was a young man, too—a good-looking young man; he favored you a little, except that he had a mustache. The officer said his name was James Kidd."

For a moment Allyne reeled like a drunken man—the room swam around him. The editor apparently did not notice the young man's agitation, though looking straight at him with his keen eyes.

"It is a wicked city!" said the editor, solemnly; then he added: "I am very much obliged," and took his departure.

"Curse the fellow!" cried Allyne, hoarsely; "it came so sudden that it took my breath away. I must be careful or I shall betray myself."

But Allyne Strathroy had no suspicion that Mr. Obadiah Howard was aught else than he represented himself to be.

But a few days afterward, being down-town, Allyne stopped into the banking-house where he kept his funds. Then, as a good joke, the cashier told him of a queer old fellow, who had said he was an autograph collector from Riverhead, Long Island, and who desired, if possible, to obtain the autograph of Mr. Allyne Strathroy, as he understood that it strongly resembled the signature of George Washington.

And the cashier further told how he had hunted up an old letter of Allyne Strathroy's, which was on file, and given the signature to the odd old man.

Allyne Strathroy laughed at the strange idea, but there was no laughter in his heart. He felt that he was in danger. Some invisible foe was weaving a web around him. The meshes might close upon him at any time. He saw plainly that Obadiah Howard and the autograph collector was one and the same. Some one had guessed his secret and was preparing to strike him.

All looked dark for Allyne Strathroy, but in the darkness came one gleam of light.

Happening to step into one of the Broadway theaters to while away a few moments, he was overjoyed to recognize upon the stage, in the leading player, Edmund Mordaunt, the outcast actor—the man that he feared so much.

"At last I know him," Allyne muttered. "If he escapes me now, it is because it is fated that I shall perish by his hand, and not he by mine."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SLASHER MAKES A MORNING CALL.

It was the morning after the night when Allyne Strathroy had made the discovery that Edmund Mordaunt was the name of the vagabond player that he feared so much, and that apparently without any reason, that an omnibus rolling up Madison avenue stopped at Twenty-third street and deposited Mr. John Duke, the notorious Slasher, upon the curbstone.

The Slasher was habited in his best attire; in fact, he looked quite the gentleman, excepting that the checks on his trousers were a little too large, and the dogs' heads on his velvet vest a little too flashy. To speak plainly, Duke's "get-up" came under the head of "loud." Not that the Slasher had any such idea, for he glanced at himself with an air of complacency that showed plainly that he was perfectly satisfied with his personal appearance.

"I rayther think this is the sort of thing," he said, as he walked slowly down the street, heading toward Fifth avenue. "Blest if I don't look like a 'blood' all over. This rig is just stunnin'. I s'pect the young sport will be rayther astonished at a call from John Duke, Esquire, as he don't happen to have the pleasure of my acquaintance. But, I think that before I've been in his shanty long, we'll be thick as thieves."

As the reader has doubtless surmised from the musings of the Slasher, that worthy was on his way to pay a morning call to Allyne Strathroy.

The Slasher turned into Fifth avenue, and as he did so, he took from his pocket the letter that the man who had been so mysteriously murdered—James Kidd—had written to Allyne Strathroy, and which he, the Slasher, had picked up from beneath the table in the room of the murdered man, on the morning when he had discovered the body.

The Slasher read the address on the envelop. Then he glanced at the number upon the house by which he stood.

"It's on the other side of the street, and I guess on the next block," he muttered. "I might as well cross over now." So over the street went the Slasher.

"Let me see," he mused, as he walked along. "Let me fix the 'slate'—prepare the programme. This letter that I found in the room is pretty good proof that this Allyne Strathroy was there on the night of the murder. S'pose I make a bold dash at it, an' swear to him that I saw him go into the house? How's that for high?" and the Slasher chuckled over the idea. "If he's the man that give Jimmy Kidd that wipe with the long knife, why, when I make the charge, he'll be apt to knuckle an' 'see me' for to hold my tongue. If he ain't the man, and is innocent of the murder, why he'll deny it, an' I've made a mistake, that's all. But I feel pretty sure he is the man. But what did he want to kill Jimmy for? That's what I can't understand. There's a mystery about it."

By the time that Duke had arrived at this conclusion, he had reached the house of Allyne Strathroy. His eyes fell upon the door-plate bearing the young man's name.

"Here's my bird," he said, with a chuckle, as he ascended the steps and gave the bell a lusty pull. "Now I'll try for to see if I can't put some salt onto his tail. If he's my man I'll let him down easy; 'bout two thousand a year; that will be a tidy salary. I couldn't steal much more nor that if I was to run for an office an' git elected."

Then the door opening, cut short Duke's meditations.

"Is Mister Allyne Strathroy in, young feller?" The Slasher wished to impress the servant with the idea that he was a swell of the first water.

"Yes," said the servant, shortly, not relishing the familiar style of the address.

"Well, just you trot off an' tell him that a gent wishes to see him on particular business," said Duke, loftily.

"Are you the gent?" asked the servant, superciliously.

"You can go your pile on that, young feller," said the Slasher, with a wink.

"Your card, sir," and the servant extended his hand.

"My what?" asked the Slasher, beginning to be a little wrathful.

"Your card, of course—your name," explained the servant, with an air of dignity.

"What do you want my name for?" demanded the Slasher, who was not over-patient by nature, and whose choler was rising at this sort of treatment.

"So I can take it in to my master; then he'll know whether he'll see you or not." The footman was very unfavorably impressed by the Slasher's manner, and had set him down as a low fellow at first sight.

"Well, my name won't be of any use, 'cos your master don't know me. Just you tell him it's a gent on particular business."

"Mr. Allyne Strathroy don't see gents as can't send in their names," said the servant, shortly; and he attempted to shut the door in the Slasher's face; but that worthy was too quick for him; for, putting his broad shoulders against the door, he pushed it open and sent the servant reeling back into the entry.

"You just try that on ag'in an' I'll hit you right in the snoot," said the Slasher, doubling up his huge fist, and advancing upon the terrified servant.

"What is the matter, Williams?" said Allyne Strathroy, speaking from the head of the stairs, whither he had been attracted by the noise in the entry.

As the sound of Allyne's voice fell upon the ears of the Slasher, he started slightly and a puzzled expression came over his face.

"Why, I've met this chap, somewhere," he muttered, "'cos I've heard that voice before."

"It's a man insists upon seeing you, sir, and he won't give his name," said the servant, retreating out of the reach of the Slasher's muscular arm.

"Say a gent, you foo-foo you!" growled the Slasher, in an undertone. The servant retreated still further along the entry.

"To see me," said Allyne, beginning to descend the stairs. Half-way down he saw the Slasher's face, and for a moment paused on the stairway, while a strange, peculiar wrinkle came between his eyes. Then again he slowly descended the stairs.

The Slasher, looking up, saw the face of the young man.

"Blest if I ain't seen him somewhere, too," the rough muttered.

"Do you wish to see me, sir?" asked Allyne, speaking in quite a low and apparently guarded tone.

"Yes, if you are Mr. Allyne Strathroy," said the Slasher, who was sorely puzzled, for when he heard the young man speak at the head of the stairs, he could have sworn that he knew the voice; but now, the voice seemed utterly strange to him. But the face still was familiar. The Slasher knew that somewhere, before, he had seen a face that looked like the face of the young man.

"Well, sir, what is your business with me?" Allyne asked. He, like the servant, was evidently not favorably impressed with the appearance of Mr. John Duke.

"My business is partic'lar and private," said the Slasher, doggedly. "I can't tell you here in the entry with that cuss a-listening. You kin hear me or not, just as you likes, I ain't partic'lar. But if you don't want to see me, why I've got a little note here, addressed by Mr. James Kidd to a young gent as lives in this neighborhood, an' I'll call upon the nearest police justice an' ask him what I ought to do about it." The Slasher's tone was loud and defiant.

"You need not make so much noise, my friend," said Allyne, coolly.

The Slasher was astonished. He had expected that, at the very mention of the name of James Kidd, Allyne Strathroy would almost have gone down on his knees before him and begged him to keep silent. But the young man was

perfectly cool and showed no symptoms of alarm whatever. The Slasher began to have an impression that perhaps he was not going to have as easy a task as he had anticipated in bringing Allyne Strathroy to terms.

"Well, you wanted to know my business, and now you knows it," returned the rough.

"If you will walk up-stairs to my library I will listen to what you have to say, although I am not in the habit of granting interviews to strangers," said Allyne, in the same cool tone that he had previously used.

"All right. I'm agreeable," replied Duke, and then he followed the young man up-stairs.

"He's a cool hand," muttered the Slasher; "it's goin' to be a more difficult job than I thought. But I'll go for him lively, though."

Allyne conducted his strange-looking visitor to his library.

They entered and Allyne closed the door. "Now, sir, your business?" Allyne asked.

"No danger of being overheard here?" the Slasher said, mysteriously.

"I think not; none of my household are in the habit of playing the eavesdropper, that I am aware of," said the young man, haughtily.

"Well, we can't be too careful, you know, Mr. Strathroy," observed the Slasher. "Walls, you know, have ears sometimes."

"I do not think that you will find that to be the case here," returned Allyne, coldly.

"There's no tellin'. I allers like to be on the safe side. Why, I knowed a feller as went up the river for five years 'cos he happened to speak a trifle loud in an oyster saloon, an' a detective heard him," said Duke, sagaciously.

"I do not understand the necessity of all this precaution, sir," said Strathroy, impatiently.

"Oh, don't yer?" questioned the rough. "Well, you will in a little while. First an' foremost then, did you ever know a man called James Kidd?" And as the rough put the question he looked eagerly into the face of the young man, expecting to behold there some trace of emotion when the name of Kidd fell upon his ears. But the Slasher was disappointed. Not a muscle of Strathroy's face moved. It was as stolid as though carved out of marble. The Slasher's first shot had evidently gone wide of the mark.

"I do not remember to have ever known a man by that name," replied Allyne.

"He was murdered in Baxter street, only a little while ago," said Duke, thinking that this shot would hit if the first had failed.

"I have neither friends nor acquaintances who reside in the neighborhood of Baxter street to my knowledge," said Allyne, a slight sneer curling the corners of his mouth.

"No, that ain't improbable 'bout the friends, but you might have had an enemy there," said the Slasher, significantly, and a cunning leer came over his face as he spoke.

"What do you mean?" asked Strathroy.

"That I accuse you of having murdered James Kidd!" said the Slasher, defiantly.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SLASHER "SLASHED."

For a moment Allyne Strathroy looked at the Slasher with a face as calm as a summer sea.

"Will you be so obliging as to repeat that last remark of yours?" he asked, in a cool, unruffled tone, that showed no trace of emotion.

"Didn't I speak plain enough?" demanded the rough, in an ugly way. "I said that I, John Duke, accuse you of the murder of James Kidd, and now what have you got to say to it?"

"What have I to say to it?" said the young man, a quiet smile upon his face. "Why, all I have to say to it is to ask you if you are drunk or crazy?"

"You'll find out if I'm drunk or crazy when you're behind the prison-bars, my gay young blood," cried the Slasher, in a rage.

"And who is going to put me there?"

"I am."

"Oh, you are!" And then again Allyne favored the rough with a look which the latter didn't like at all.

"Yes, I am," returned the Slasher, doggedly; "that is, I will unless you are reasonable an' do what's right."

"Do what is right?" said the young man, repeating the words as if unable to guess their meaning.

"Yes," said the Slasher; "I don't bear you any malice 'bout the affair, though Jimmy was an old pard' of mine."

"Jimmy?"

"Yes; the man you killed—stabbed to the heart."

"I beg your pardon. Allow me to correct you in one little particular: not, 'the man that I killed,' but the man that *you* say I killed," said Allyne, quietly.

"Well, I kin prove it, too!" exclaimed the Slasher, defiantly.

"Oh, you can?"

"Yes, unless you 'come down.'"

"That is, you mean unless I pay you to keep silence?" said Allyne.

"Yes, that's just what I mean," replied the Slasher.

"It is a case of blackmail, then?"

"You kin call it what you like," said the rough, sullenly; "but unless you come down with the rocks, I goes straight from here to the nearest police justice, and I gets out a warrant for your arrest."

"Oh, you do?"

"Yes, I do!" cried Duke, enraged at the cool tone of the man whom he had confidently expected would go down on his knees before him and beg for mercy when he charged him with his crime.

"To get out a warrant it is necessary to be able to swear to something. Now, what can you swear to, to connect me with this murder that you speak of?" asked Allyne, coolly.

"Do you see this letter?" and Duke held up the letter that he had found under the table, and which we have spoken of before.

"Yes, I see it," said Allyne, without betraying any emotion.

"This letter was written by James Kidd to Allyne Strathroy—you see the address?"

"And how comes that letter in your hands?" sternly asked Allyne.

The Slasher looked at him for a moment in blank amazement.

"Well, you are a cool hand," he said, at length. "How does it come in my hands? I'll tell you." The Slasher felt that he was about to run the chase to earth. "This letter is an appointment for you to come to No. 52 Baxter street on a certain night. You went to the house and you dropped this letter there. I found it under the table the next morning, at the same time that I discovered the dead body of Kidd, the man killed by you. This letter proves that you were in the house the night that he was murdered. 'Tain't much evidence I know, but I guess it's enough to start on, an' a trial will probably fetch out the reason why you did kill him."

"You have no proof that Allyne Strathroy ever received that letter," said Allyne, thoughtfully.

"Oh, hain't I?" said the Slasher, with a grin. "It was sent through the post-office; the canceled stamp proves the delivery, and if that don't, the carrier will."

"You say that letter was written to Allyne Strathroy by Kidd?"

"Yes."

"Yet it is signed Williams?"

"Oh, you know that? Then of course you did receive it?"

"I do not say that I did."

"Well, as to Kidd's writing it, I can swear to his handwriting," said the Slasher.

"You are a liar!" cried Allyne, hastily.

"What!" yelled the Slasher, raising his arm in rage and advancing toward the young man; but quick as the flash of the lightning, Allyne struck the rough with all the force of his powerful arm. It was a flush hit in the throat, just under the right ear. It was a terrible blow, lifting the muscular Slasher from off his feet as though he had been but a child, and hurling him, stunned and almost lifeless, into a corner of the room, where he sunk down, all in a heap.

The precious letter escaped from his nerveless grip and fell upon the carpet.

With a look of triumph Allyne picked it up.

There was a little fire burning in the grate in the room.

Allyne held the letter in the blaze, and in a few seconds the paper was ashes. All proof that he had been in Kidd's room on the night of the murder was destroyed. Allyne, so far, had beaten the rough.

After destroying the letter, Allyne Strathroy sat down and waited for the Slasher to recover his senses.

It was a minute or two before the Slasher blinked his eyes around him, and then it was in utter amazement. He could hardly realize his position. Finally his look fell upon the young man, who sat watching him with a quiet smile.

"Say, did you hit me?" asked the rough, rising slowly from his recumbent position.

"Yes."

The Slasher felt of his head in a stupid way, as if half asleep. "I feel as if I'd been kicked by a horse." Then he suddenly remembered. "Where's that letter?"

"What letter?"

"That letter to you from Kidd." And the rough looked bewildered.

"Letter to me? you have been dreaming," said Allyne, quietly. "I know nothing of any letter."

Then the Slasher's eyes fell upon the fire; he saw there the ashes of the paper, and he instantly understood what had taken place.

"Curse it!" he cried, in anger, "you've beat me, but I'll fix you yet."

"Oh, no, you won't," said Strathroy, coolly.

"Why won't I?"

"Because you are going to serve me."

"I'll see you—"

"No you won't!" interrupted Allyne. "It will be as I say. You came here with a certain object. You have failed in one way but you will succeed in another."

"I don't understand," said the discomfited Slasher.

"You came here to get money from me. You tried force and you have failed."

"More fool I; but who in blazes would have supposed that you could hit that way? Why, you look as if I could take you across my knee and break you in two," growled the indignant rough.

"Appearances are deceptive, sometimes," returned Allyne.

"Now listen to me. I want a service done and I am willing to pay well for it. I think that you are just the man to perform that service, Mr. John Duke."

"Hallo! do you know me?" Duke asked, in astonishment.

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I thought I'd met you somewhere, but I couldn't remember where it was," said Duke, rather puzzled.

"We have never met," said Allyne, coldly. "I saw your picture once in one of the illustrated papers and a slight sketch of your life. I recognized the notorious Slasher, the shoulder-hitter, the moment I saw you."

"Those blasted papers are allers poking their noses into other people's business," said Duke, with a growl.

"Your life was in the *Police Gazette*."

"Light and entertaining readin', murders and sich like," remarked the Slasher, with a grin.

"And for the service I want done—"

"What is it?"

"There's a certain man in this city that I don't like—"

"Oh!"

"It would please me greatly if I should read in the newspapers some morning that he had fallen down and broken his neck," said Allyne, carelessly.

"Jest so," responded the Slasher, who perfectly understood the young man's meaning.

"In fact the intelligence would please me so much that I would be willing to pay for the pleasure."

"How much?" The Slasher was coming down to business.

"What do you suppose it would be worth?"

"That depends a good deal upon who the man is," replied the Slasher, thoughtfully. "If it's a rich cove that there'll be a fuss kicked up about, and who will be difficult to get at, it's worth a high figure, 'cos there's the risk."

"This man is an actor, now playing at a Broadway theater; his name is Edmund Mordaunt. It will be easy enough to get at him, for of course he leaves the theater late at night. There's little risk."

"That's so," said the Slasher. "Is five hundred too much?"

"I think so."

"I'll have to have three or four more for to make a sure thing of it. Say three hundred."

"It's a bargain," replied Allyne.

"All right. Now I jist want a line or two 'bout the affair. We'll fix it as they do at Albany, where you know they can't be bribed. Just you bet me three hundred dollars that this Mordaunt won't die for three months."

"Well."

"You'll lose the bet inside of a week," said the Slasher, with a grin.

"Yes, I understand." So Allyne drew out the bet in sporting style and gave it to the rough.

"Say," said that worthy, suddenly, as he was about to depart, "have you ever been in politics?"

"No," replied Allyne.

"Well, you oughter go right in. A man that kin hit as hard as you kin—why, there ain't an office in New York that you couldn't git. You go in—you'd be mayor in no time." And the Slasher departed.

"Now, Mordaunt, if you escape this time, heaven itself protects you," Allyne exclaimed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"CHUBBET'S FRIEND."

After the interview between Allyne Strathroy and Blanche Maybury, wherein she had shown such firm determination not to become his wife, Allyne had written to Mr. Chubbet to call at his earliest convenience. And in obedience to that request, on the evening of the day on which the interview between Strathroy and the Slasher had taken place, the old lawyer called at the Strathroy mansion.

Allyne gave him the full particulars of the scene that had taken place between Blanche and himself, and at the end of the recital asked the lawyer's opinion.

"My dear boy," said the old lawyer, in his usual placid way, "I don't really know what to say or what to advise in the matter. A woman is such a queer mortal—but I think that the best plan is for me to see Miss Blanche. After an interview with her, why I may be able to form some idea of what is the best course to pursue."

"You will find her willful—headstrong," replied Allyne.

"If that be so, we must find some way to make her obedient," said the lawyer, significantly.

"Very well. I'll speak to one of the servants and have Blanche informed that you are here." And Allyne rose and left the parlor.

"He is a remarkably smart young man," said the old lawyer, after Allyne had departed. "I'm afraid that we are going to have trouble with this girl. Ah!" and the lawyer heaved a deep sigh; "women are so unreasonable. They never know what is good for them."

The lawyer did not have much time to meditate, for in a few minutes after Allyne's departure, Blanche entered the room.

"My dear Miss Blanche," said the lawyer, rising in haste and shaking hands with her, warmly. "I am truly delighted to see you. Ah! my dear child, I think you grow more and more lovely each day. You can not conceive what a joy it is to my heart to think that I—an humble instrument—should have the care—I do not think that I am putting it strongly when I say the sacred care—of such a tender flower as you are. Ah, my dear child, we have but little in this world. As the poet says, 'we have but little here below, but want that little strong'—I mean, 'long.' My dear Miss Blanche, pray be seated. I have something of the greatest importance to say to you." The lawyer was commencing his attack with a dose of flattery. It was his favorite saying, "tell a woman she is beautiful and your cause is half won."

Blanche sat down. She had a slight suspicion what the subject of the lawyer's conversation would be.

"My dear child, watching you grow up, as I have, from child to girlhood, and being besides your guardian, I feel toward you the affection of a father. I have, of course, as is but natural, a great desire to see you happily settled in life. And I thought that that desire would be realized in your marriage with Allyne. My dear Miss Blanche, had you considered fully of the matter that you spoke to me about the other day?"

"In regard to Mr. Strathroy?" Blanche asked.

"Yes, my dear."

"I have considered it fully," Blanche answered, firmly.

"And is your mind still the same?"

"Not to be his wife?—yes."

"My dear, I am terribly afflicted to hear you say so. You can not imagine the anguish that Mr. Allyne is suffering. You have caused that unhappy young man to give himself up to despair. My dear Miss Blanche, don't you

think it possible that you will change your mind?" said the lawyer, in his blandest tones.

"No."

The single word, so easily comprehended, so difficult to understand, convinced the lawyer that it would be no easy task to change Blanche's mind.

"But, my dear, I really can not understand why you should have such an objection to fulfilling your contract with Mr. Strathroy."

"I do not love him."

"Ah, my dear, don't you think you are acting a leetle hastily in this matter?" Here was a chance for special pleading and the lawyer took advantage of it. "Love, you know, my dear, is such a peculiar sort of a—of a— What shall we call it? Passion? Well, passion will do. We never know exactly when it comes or when it goes. It is mysterious—incomprehensible; and, my dear child, I have really come to the conclusion that in this life of ours those couples are happiest that get along without any love at all."

"It is no wonder that a lawyer should think that way," said Blanche, with a half-smile.

"Why so, my dear?" asked Chubbet, who did not guess the drift of her words.

"Because, if all the people that married truly loved each other, there wouldn't be so many divorce cases, and, of course, not half so much work for you legal gentlemen," responded the girl.

"Ah, yes—yes—my dear." The lawyer felt the force of the retort, and, baffled at one point, tried another. "But, my dear, remember that you forfeit your fortune if you do not marry Allyne. It is a great deal of money to give up. You will be poor—it's a horrible thing to be poor."

"I would rather be poor than married to a man that I can not love," returned Blanche, warmly.

"My dear child, such sayings as that are all very well in novels and on the stage. We expect, of course, all sorts of fine things of that order; but, in real life, it's quite different. Now, just look around you at the young ladies of your acquaintance. The first thing they say when they speak of a young gentleman is, 'is he handsome?' that's when they are thinking of a flirtation; but the moment they think of matrimony the question changes into, 'is he rich? has he got money?' Love, my dear, is all very well in the abstract, but you've no idea how much better it is when coupled with plenty of money."

"I am afraid that if I do not marry for love I shall never marry at all," said Blanche, decidedly. "I am not sentimental enough to want to marry a man who can not support me and to whom I shall be a burden; but, I think that a wife, who truly loves her husband, is very rarely a burden to him, if sickness does not drag her down. I have fully decided upon my course. I have thought over it long and earnestly."

"And that course is?"

"Not to marry Allyne Strathroy, even though my decision strips me of my fortune and I have to work for my daily bread." The heightened color in the girl's cheek, the sparkle of her eye, and the firm, decided tone in her voice, told that she was fully in earnest.

"Work?" exclaimed Chubbet, in horror. "My dear child, you don't know what work means?"

"Do I not?" asked Blanche, with a smile; "then I suppose I must find out. There are thousands of girls in New York who work—and work hard, too, for their bread. I don't know that I am any better than any one of them. I think that there is something noble in a woman's fighting the world for her life, not depending upon a man's strong arm for support. It's—it's pluck—that's the word I want; and I never pass a work-girl in the street with her quick, cheerful step, and her bright, earnest face, but I feel a strong inclination to take her in my arms, and kiss her as a sister, better and worthier than I."

"My dear, I always feel that way myself," said the lawyer. "I respect them, I admire them; but they're brought up to it—used to it. Now, what can *you* do to earn your living?"

"Use some of the gifts that heaven has given me," replied Blanche. "I am an excellent musician—or, at least, everybody says so."

"And you would teach for a living?"

"Yes."

"This is dreadful!"

"Better than to marry a man I do not love," replied Blanche.

"Well, my dear," said Chubbet, rising, "I am sorry. I must see Allyne, and try and console him. Good-night, my dear." And the lawyer passed out of the room.

"The infernal obstinate little devil!" he muttered, as he ascended the stairs. "Women are all alike; as the poet says, 'saints in their parlors,' what-d'ye-call-it 'in their kitchens.' Like a cat's back, smooth enough one way, stroke it the other and the teeth and claws appear."

The lawyer found Allyne in his room.

"Well, what success?" he asked.

"None at all, my dear boy," answered the lawyer, with a shake of the head.

"She is obstinate?"

"As a mule."

"What is to be done?"

"My dear boy, I have a plan," said the lawyer, after thinking a moment. "It has just occurred to me. I have a friend up-town—a doctor by profession, a most excellent man, but he has been unfortunate. He was in practice in some little place in Maine, but, unluckily, a patient happened to die while under his treatment. This patient was an old and tolerably well-to-do man. When his will was produced, it was found that he had left the doctor some twenty thousand dollars—nothing but natural, of course, considering the doctor's care and skill. Would you believe it? the heirs of the old gentleman—nephews, nieces, etc.—kicked up a row—swore that their relative was insane; in fine, broke the will, and made such a noise about it—they even went so far as to say (and I believe they proved it, too) that the doctor held the old man's hand and guided it across the paper when he signed the will—that my friend was obliged to leave that part of the country. He came to New York and established a sort of a private lunatic asylum. It's near the North river, in Manhattanville. His patients are those sent there by their friends, who do not desire to send them to a public asylum. They have the best of care, and are kept *strictly private*."

Allyne guessed the lawyer's scheme.

"And you propose?"

"To take Miss Blanche out for a ride some afternoon; stop at the doctor's place—it's like a private country house, so she will have no suspicions—take her in; explain that it's a friend's residence, and after she is inside, give her into the doctor's care as being a harmless lunatic."

"But will he receive her without a physician's certificate?"

"Certainly; he's a doctor—can't he tell at a glance that she's insane, *particularly when I tell him so?*"

Allyne fully understood the character of the doctor's establishment.

As long as the patient was paid for, the "doctor" could easily detect insanity.

This is not fiction that we are writing, but fact. The recent release of an esteemed citizen from such a horrible den must be still fresh in the recollection of our readers.

And so the plot was arranged between Allyne and the old lawyer.

There was no friend to warn Blanche of the terrible danger that menaced her young life.

CHAPTER XIX.

ENTERING THE SNARE.

It was a bright, pleasant afternoon.

Lysander Chubbet, Esq., seated behind a pair of handsome grays—for the old lawyer was partial to horses and drove as neat a pair as ever beat three minutes in Harlem lane—drove up to the Strathroy mansion.

Mr. Chubbet dismounted and ascended the steps. The door was opened by Allyne, who, from the parlor window, had watched the approach of the lawyer.

"Delightful afternoon, Mr. Allyne!" said the lawyer, briskly, as he entered the house.

"Yes," responded Allyne, as he led the way into the parlor.

"Well?" Strathroy questioned, after they had entered the room, "are you about to put the scheme you spoke of in operation?"

"Exactly!" replied the lawyer, with emphasis.

"Then you are—"

"About to ask Miss Blanche to take an airing with me as far as King's Bridge," said the lawyer, with a cunning smile.

"Have you made all the arrangements then?"

"Precisely," replied Chubbet, rubbing his fat palms together with an air of great satisfaction. "I drove out to my friend's place this morning, explained to him the nature of Miss Blanche's malady, and he readily consented to receive the young lady and place her under treatment. The terms will be thirty dollars per week."

"Cheap enough," observed Allyne, "considering the risk—"

"Risk!" interrupted the lawyer, in astonishment, "what possible risk can there be?"

"Why, if it should be discovered by any chance that Blanche is not insane—"

"Yes, but, my dear young friend, there isn't the least doubt about the young lady's insanity," said the lawyer. "Doesn't she refuse to fulfill her contract with you? Doesn't she declare that, rather than marry you, she will give up her fortune? Mr. Allyne, with these facts I would go before any jury in the world, and I shouldn't have the least fear regarding the verdict. Besides, then, you see, mistakes *will* happen. The young lady may be insane now, and at some future time recover her senses. It is not improbable in the least. The actual fact is, one-half of the world differ from the other half as to what constitutes insanity. To put it in a clear light, so that you will understand it, I will suppose a couple of cases. Two sailors, both under the influence of liquor, engage in a quarrel; one stabs and kills the other; the sailor is convicted of murder and hung. Two prominent politicians engage in a quarrel; they meet, one falls by the hand of the other; the survivor is tried, he is insane at the time, and a jury of his peers acquit him. Do you see the difference?"

"No, I confess I do not," said Allyne.

"Well, you are not an intelligent jury," replied the lawyer.

"Then you think that there isn't any danger?"

"Not the slightest. In the first place she will never leave the doctor's house until she is your wife. Then she can make all the complaints that she likes. Wives like to complain, you know; it's woman's nature; they wouldn't be happy unless they were suffering. Such is my experience with the sex," said the lawyer, philosophically.

"You will take her to the doctor's house right away?"

"Yes, after a short drive," replied Chubbet; "once she is in the house, she won't get out again easily, unless she consents."

"But, suppose she should refuse to become my wife even then?" asked Allyne.

"My dear young friend, people that are insane are not supposed to have any mind of their own," replied the old lawyer, with a significant wink; "therefore, if she is obstinate, and will *not* consent, why, she will have to be married without consenting."

Lysander Chubbet was not a man to allow a woman's weak will to interfere with his plans, evidently.

"I'll send Blanche down to you," said Allyne. "You have no doubt about succeeding?"

"Not the slightest!" answered Chubbet, firmly.

Allyne left the room, and in a few minutes Blanche entered.

"My dear Miss Blanche!" cried Chubbet, rising and greeting her with warmth. "I was passing the house with my grays for a little ride up the avenue, and I thought that perhaps I could induce you to go with me. You really look as if you needed fresh air."

The lawyer spoke the truth, for Blanche did not look well. The roses had faded from her cheeks, and there was a faint blue line beneath the eyes that told of care and sorrow.

It is no easy task to tear the first love of a young girl's life from her heart; and when her own will is the instrument that does the deed, it seldom fails to make the cheek pale and the white forehead show the line of care.

"No, I do not feel well," Blanche replied, truthfully.

"Then, my dear, you must positively come with me and try a little fresh air. Come, it will do you good."

"Will you wait a minute until I dress?" asked Blanche, who thought that the drive would do her good, and perhaps relieve her mind for a few minutes from the sadness that weighed so heavily upon it.

"Certainly, my dear; with pleasure," replied the lawyer, in his blandest tones.

So Blanche ran up-stairs to dress.

"A minute!" muttered Chubbet, after she had left the room; "she means an hour. I never knew a woman to dress herself under an hour in all my life." The old lawyer evidently was prejudiced against the fair sex.

"So far, so good!" chuckled Chubbet to himself. "Once I get her into the hands of Doctor Fondell, I rather think that I shall finger a check signed by Mr. Allyne Strathroy, for a nice little sum of money. It will be about the easiest earned money that ever came into my hands. This foolish child to think—even for a single moment—that she could defeat the purpose of a man like myself! I rather fancy, from what Allyne said, that his interview with her the other day was a little stormy in its nature. Ah! these young people *will* be rash. Now, I adopted the soothing system with her—soft words—honey, not vinegar. The consequence is, she trusts me, while she probably fears him. See the advantage of my system! Besides, it's a great deal more pleasant to use."

Not a single particle of remorse was in the breast of the old lawyer as he thought over the trap that he had planned to snare the feet of the orphan heiress. His was a nature utterly gross. Greed and cunning were its two leading attributes. There are many like Lysander Chubbet in this world, hiding the false heart beneath the mask of benevolence and pity.

Blanche did not take an hour to dress, as the old lawyer had anticipated, but in some ten minutes came down attired for the drive.

"Ah, my dear Miss Blanche," cried the lawyer, rising, "I will undertake to bring the color back to your cheeks before I bring you home again." And as Chubbet did not intend to bring her home again, it was not a rash saying of his.

"I am all ready," Blanche said.

"So I perceive, my dear," said the lawyer, leading the way to the street. "I declare I shall have all the young men on the avenue envying me this afternoon, when they see what a charming companion I have."

"You are flattering me," said Blanche, a faint smile upon her pale features.

"Not at all," responded Chubbet, quickly. "Egad! I don't blame Mr. Allyne for being unwilling to resign you. I should find it a hard task, I think, if I were in his place."

Blanche did not reply, but the shrewd eyes of the lawyer noticed that the smile faded from her lips, and a sad expression came over her face at the mention of Allyne's name.

"No hope for my young friend, Allyne, of her own free will, I fear," thought the lawyer, as he assisted Blanche into the carriage.

Blanche seated, the lawyer jumped in quite nimbly for one of his years and weight, for Lysander Chubbet was far from being a spare man; good living and rich wines had made the lawyer plump, and his full round face testified beyond a doubt that fasting was foreign to his nature.

Chubbet took up the reins and the grays started off at a gentle trot up the avenue.

"By the way, my dear Miss Blanche—excuse the question—but have you fully made up your mind in regard to Mr. Allyne?" the lawyer asked. He had a desire to know if there was a chance for success without putting into practice the scheme he had formed.

Again the expression of pain came over Blanche's face. The lawyer noticed it. He was watching the girl with the same sort of curiosity with which the savant looks upon the agonies of an animal that he has drugged to learn the power of some new poison.

"Yes," Blanche answered, slowly.

"Then there isn't any hope that I shall some day see you the wife of my young friend?"

"No." White were the lips that pronounced the little word and painful was the effort.

"Ah!" and the wily old lawyer gave utterance to a deep sigh, "you can not imagine how I am pained by this intelligence. I had hoped to see you—as the poet says, 'two souls with but a single thought; two hearts that—that'—beat for nobody else." As usual, Chubbet forgot the end of the quotation.

"No, it can never be," said Blanche, sadly, but firmly.

"But I can not understand the reason for this sudden change," observed the lawyer.

"I can not explain it, even to myself," replied Blanche. "All that I can say is, that I have changed. I do not love Allyne any longer. He does not seem to me to be the same man that he was. His whole nature has changed. It seems to me like a horrid dream, and that—like the old fairy stories—some dreadful monster, some wicked spirit has taken possession of Allyne. I know that to think in such a way is folly, perhaps madness; but I can not think otherwise. When I look at him now, I see Allyne's face; when he speaks,

I hear Allyne's voice, and yet I know that he does not possess the heart that I once loved. That has changed."

The girl was right. A scarlet crime had changed the whole nature of Allyne Strathroy.

As they rode on, Chubbet felt that his plan must be tried.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SCHEME OF THE TOMBS LAWYER.

In a dingy law-office, hardly a stone's throw from the New York Tombs—that celebrated pile—sat two men beside a table, on which lay a handful of folded legal papers, yellow and musty with age.

The little sign upon the door of this office bore the inscription, "T. WEISEL, ATTORNEY-AT-LAW." And one of the men who sat by the table was T. Weisel, Esq., in person.

Timothy Weisel was a lawyer of the class popularly known as "Tombs shysters." One of the kind who accepted any thing from a client in the shape of fees, from a five-dollar "greenback," down to a pawn-ticket for a pocket-handkerchief. All was fish that came to his net.

In person, the lawyer was a little fellow, spare in figure, and with a sharp-peaked face, wherein was set a pair of sharp gray eyes, deeply sunken in the head and overhung by protruding eyebrows.

The face of the lawyer, somehow, gave one an idea of a rat—of an animal who was at war with all the world—who would rather run than fight, and yet would, when cornered and forced to it, fight fiercely.

The lawyer was rather shabbily clad in a rusty black suit; and, from his personal appearance, one would have been apt to quickly guess that the world had not gone well with him lately.

The guess would have been an apt one, too, for fortune and Timothy Weisel, Attorney-at-law, had not been close friends for some time past. But if the truth be told, it was the lawyer's fault. Being fond of liquor, he had neglected his business, taken to drinking bad whisky, and thus put into his stomach what should have gone on his back.

Weisel was a smart lawyer in his way. He had few equals in criminal practice in New York. Not that he had ever handled any important cases; but in minor trials many a poor devil had reason to bless his lucky stars that he had retained lawyer Weisel for his counsel, and thus had saved himself a trip to the "Island," or perhaps to Sing Sing. Weisel was clever as a pettifogger. No keener eye was there than his, to detect a flaw in an indictment, among all the members of the New York bar. And, although Weisel had indulged in some pretty sharp practice at times, and had incurred the enmity of all his professional brethren who claimed to be respectable, by inserting advertisements in the papers headed, "DIVORCES PROCURED WITHOUT PUBLICITY, ETC.," still he was sharp enough to keep just within bounds, and afforded his enemies no excuse for flinging him over the "bars."

The companion of Mr. Weisel was a thick-set, muscular fellow, with a bulldog-like face. He was known as Billy O'Kay, and was notorious among the frequenters of the various courts of justice in New York as a "straw-bailist." That is, when a man was put under bonds for some offense—for instance, for assault and battery; for folks *do* get arrested, even in New York, for such a thing, *sometimes*; Billy would "put in an appearance" with some respectable-looking gentleman in black, who would swear that he was Mr. So-and-so, of No. — Third avenue, coal dealer, or butcher, or merchant—as the case might be—and worth so much money in real estate; offer to go bail for the prisoner. The bail is accepted and the prisoner released. And if in time the prosecuting party does appear to follow up the charge, the prisoner is missing. The bail is sent for, and Mr. So-and-so, coal dealer, etc., is found to be either an entirely different man from the gentleman in black who had appeared in the court-room, or else he is not found at all. This is the way they work "straw-bail" in New York. Of course, in some cases, it is openly winked at by the presiding officer of the so-called court of justice.

Lawyer Weisel and Billy O'Kay had had quite a lot of business together, for in the peculiar practice of the lawyer, straw-bail and witnesses who were able and willing to swear to any thing, provided they were told beforehand what it was, were very essential.

"Billy, I am not joking," said Weisel, who possessed a clear though rather shrill voice; "there's a large amount of money in this affair, if it's only handled rightly."

"How much?" asked Billy, who, though bearing a name of Hibernian extraction, had very little of the "brogue" in his tone.

"What do you say to ten thousand dollars?" asked Weisel, with a cunning smile upon his sharp features.

"How much?" said Billy, in astonishment.

"Ten thousand dollars," repeated the lawyer.

"You ain't foolin', are yer?"

"No; sober earnest."

"Well, I should say that it was a hefty sum fur to make on one little job," replied Billy.

"Oh, you think it's a large sum, eh?"

"Well, I just do, now!" cried the redoubtable Billy. "Why, I couldn't make more nor that if I got a posish in the street department." We had forgot to mention that Billy was a "big gun" in "ward politics."

"Well, if you think ten thousand is a big sum, what do you think of twenty thousand?" asked Weisel.

"Oh, say; you're only gassin'!" replied Billy, a little indignant.

"Oh, no, I ain't!" cried Weisel, emphatically. "I never was more in earnest in all my life. I say that, with these musty old papers here, and with your help, I can make twenty thousand dollars, and perhaps thirty thousand—perhaps forty thousand—perhaps fifty thousand—"

"Hold on!" cried Billy, in alarm; "you've got up high enough now. I guess you've been drinking too much whisky lately, an' it's got into your brain, 'cos ye're talkin' loony now."

"Billy, this is unkind," said Weisel, reproachfully. "You know that you were as drunk as I was; and besides, I paid for the liquor."

"Well, I didn't say yer didn't," returned Billy, doggedly. "But you can't gammon this child with any fifty thousand dollars; yer can't stuff that down my throat. It's too thin, an' it won't wash."

"Billy, did I ever deceive you?" asked Weisel.

"I don't know—but you can't come any fifty thousand dollars over me, now, hossfly," replied Billy, with an air of determination.

"Just you listen to me," urged Weisel. "I offer you a share in this thing because I need your aid. It won't cost any thing to try it, even if it fails. Now you just listen, and I'll explain."

"Sail in," ejaculated Billy, preparing to listen.

"It's quite a long story," said the lawyer, "and I'll have to explain it fully, so that you will understand all the particulars. It's a beautiful case to work up—clear as daylight, except one point, and there I want your help. Twenty-four years ago," began the lawyer, while Billy listened attentively, "a young Fifth avenue 'blood' married a poor girl who 'tended in a fancy-goods store on the Bowery. The marriage was a private one, and took place at the minister's house, with only the servants of the clergyman for witnesses. After the marriage, the 'blood' took his wife down to Charleston, South Carolina. There a child was born; a boy. After the child was born, the husband got tired of the wife, and deserted her. The cause of the desertion was, that he had fallen in love with a wealthy Southern girl. This girl he married and brought to New York with him. It was a bold thing to do, to commit bigamy, but the 'blood' thought he had every thing his own way. He had kept the marriage certificate of the first wife. He knew that she was not only ignorant of where the minister's house was, but even of his name. Besides, she was friendless—without money, while he had plenty. He thought that she would never be able to prove her marriage, and he was right, for she never did."

"After she was deserted by this man in Charleston, she managed, with her baby, to beg her way to New York. She had a brother here, a rough customer—you know him well, Billy, but I refrain from mentioning his name now. I got all the first part of this history from him. Of course, he had no idea what scent I was on."

"Well, the girl told the brother how she had been wronged, and he instantly took the law in his own hands—stabbed the 'blood' on Broadway, and went to Sing Sing for five years for it. But the 'blood' didn't die; he recovered."

"Now, when the brother went to Sing Sing, he put his sister, the deserted wife, with a family in Hester street; and

there, in a short time, she died. The child she left was sent to the brother at Sing Sing, and he arranged to have it boarded with a woman in Sing Sing village."

"Now, while these events were taking place, the second wife had a child—a boy, too, only about a year's difference between the births of the two children of the 'blood.'"

"After serving a year at Sing Sing, the brother is—through political influence—pardoned out, and he comes instantly to New York, intent upon killing the 'blood' that had wronged his sister, for he had sworn to do it when he was sentenced in the court-room."

"And jolly well right he was, too," remarked Billy, in a tone of approbation.

"Exactly," said Weisel; "but the 'blood' heard of his release, and didn't wait for him to fulfill his threat, but cleared out instantly for parts unknown. The brother came to New York—found that the man he sought had run away. Then the brother went back to Sing Sing, to get the child, and found to his astonishment that both the child and the woman he had left it with had departed without leaving any clue to their whereabouts. The brother came back to New York, and that ends his connection with my story."

"Now for the other links in the chain. The 'blood,' when he fled from New York, went straight to Sing Sing. He had discovered, by some means, that his child, which he had deserted, was there, and he wanted it, as circumstances had forced him away from the other child. He bribed the woman to go with him and take the child. She went, but retribution followed the guilty man. This woman was the wife of a prisoner in Sing Sing—a desperate English burglar. When he was released, he followed his wife to the little Western city, where the 'blood' had settled under an assumed name. The woman had discovered that he had plenty of money, so one dark night her husband was let into the house by her. He killed the 'blood' in his bed, took all his money, his papers—among them the marriage certificate of the wife—then, with his wife and the baby, came to New York. Of course he knew nothing of these facts that I've related, and, of course, could make no use of the papers. He died in jail here about two months ago, while waiting trial. I was his lawyer, and so the papers came into my hands. I saw a chance for a ten-strike—I found out the brother—pumped him of all he knew. Then went down to Charleston; found the doctor that attended the wife in her illness, and the minister who baptized the child. I got their evidence, and that sworn to. The child has a peculiar mark on the right arm. And I've got the child, too. He's a man now, of course. Now all I want to complete the evidence is the woman who brought the child up. She separated from the burglar some years since, and I haven't been able to find her. You see, I can trace the child from its birth to the time that it came into the hands of this woman; but I can't find the woman. Now, if you can find one that will fill the bill—that will swear to certain facts that I can instruct her in, the chain of evidence will be complete."

"But where does your fifty thousand dollars come in?" asked Billy.

"Why, when the father was stabbed he thought he was going to die, and made a will. When he ran away and didn't come back, the will was finally admitted to probate, under the belief that he was dead—which, at the time, he really was, as I have explained. The property was—as every one supposed—left to his son by his second wife. Of course his first marriage and the birth of a child was a secret to the world."

"But the fifty thousand?" said Billy, who couldn't see any money in the affair, so far.

"I have discovered a flaw on the will," said Weisel, quietly, but his little eyes sparkling. "The child by the first wife—the man that I now hold in my hands—whose identity I alone can prove, is the legal heir to all the estate now held by the son of the second wife."

"Je-rusalem!" ejaculated Billy, in admiration; "what a head you have got. I've got the woman for you, too—swear to any thing as long as she's paid."

"Good! Then I'll make something handsome out of the affair. Billy, I'll give you a thousand dollars for your witness."

"'Nuff sed—shake!" And the villainous compact was made.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SLASHER ON THE WAR-PATH.

ON the Saturday night of the week wherein the events related in the preceding chapters had taken place, a group of men were standing on the corner of Crosby and Houston streets.

The time was about half-past ten. The night was dark, with threatenings of rain in the air.

The group of men on the corner were rough-looking fellows, four in number, with bullet heads, hair cropped short, scarred and battered features.

Prominent among them was one who seemed to be a leader. In person he stood nearly a head taller than the rest. This man was no other than John Duke, the Slasher; and his companions were members of the Baxter street gang of roughs who acknowledged the notorious Slasher as their leader.

The Slasher and his gang were evidently on the look-out for some one, for they kept a close watch down Crosby street.

"It must be about time for the cove to come 'out,'" said one, whose unmistakable accent gave proof that he was an Englishman.

"Not yet," responded the Slasher; "the theater ain't out yet, an' then he's got for to get out of his stage togs and dress."

"I wish they'd hurry up," growled another of the roughs, in a hoarse voice. "I'm gitting tired of waiting."

"Yes, an' it's cold, too," said the fourth of the gang, who was thinly clad. "I'd like to have a drink of whisky. This wind cuts a feller to the bone."

"It won't be long," replied the Slasher. "And after the job is over, you can drink all the whisky you likes."

"Wot's the programme, anyway?" asked the Englishman.

"Well, when he comes out, Jimmy—who is a-watchin' at the back door of the theater—will whistle; then we'll jist follow on his track, let him cross the Bowery, then get ahead of him, and cut him off in Rivington street. There's a dark block just the other side of Allen, that will suit us first-rate. We'll lay for him there, an' go for him," explained the Slasher.

"Are we to just punch him once or twice, or for to lay him out cold?" asked the second ruffian.

"Lay him out," replied Duke; "make a job for the coroner to-morrow. Just use your brass knuckles or slungshots on him. We don't want to half do it, yer know, 'cos if he should happen to get over it, an' should recognize any of us hereafter, it might make trouble for us; so just finish the thing up neat while yer about it."

"Oh, we'll fix the bloke," said the Englishman, significantly. "If I get a good, square lick at him, all the doctors in this blasted country wouldn't bring him round again, you know."

"Will he be apt to have any one with him?" asked another.

"No," replied Duke. "Jimmy's watched him home two nights, an' he's allers been alone. We kin double-bank him just as easy as kin be."

"The theater must be out," said the Englishman, looking along Houston street. "I kin see a crowd a-goin' up Broadway."

The group all looked toward Broadway.

As the Englishman had said, a crowd of people were pouring up the street.

"That's so," said the Slasher, after a look. "It won't be long, then, afore he comes out."

"I shan't be sorry, for I'm as cold as kin be," said the fourth of the gang, who had before complained of the chill air.

"You'll be snug in your roost afore an hour is over, with some 'greenbacks' for to set up the drinks with," responded the Slasher.

"An' that's where the joke comes in," said the Englishman, with a grin.

"Say, who is it that's a-goin' for this rooster?" asked the third rough.

"How kin I tell?" demanded the Slasher, roughly. "A gent, as I don't knows, comes to me an' says he'll give fifty dollars—that's ten apiece for us—for to have this theater actor double-banked an' whipped; an' he wants him whipped well, too—he don't want the job spoilt by bein' underdone. In fact, to speak right out, he wants him put out of the way. Well, I took the job. I spoke to you fellers about it and

offered the fair thing—share an' share alike. Fifty dollars, an' there's five of us, countin' Jimmy; that's ten dollars apiece, as I said afore. Now, that's all I knows about the job. The gent give me twenty-five dollars down, an' he's to pony up the other twenty-five Monday morning, if we do the job to-night. Now, you knows as much about it as I do, an' I hope yer satisfied."

The Slasher's explanation was probable enough, and the roughs accepted it without hesitation.

"That's square," said the Englishman.

"Couldn't be fairer!" exclaimed the third one of the gang.

"If yer satisfied, then, it's all right," said Duke. "Now, just keep your ears open for Jimmy's whistle. He'll whistle when our man comes out."

From the above given explanation it will be plainly seen how much a man's life is worth in New York city, sometimes.

The roughs remained on the corner, listening intently, for some fifteen minutes. Then the sound of a whistle came out shrilly on the night air.

"That's the signal; the cove has started!" cried Duke; "so let's travel, boys."

And down the street went the roughs at a fast walk.

In front of the back-door of the theater they were joined by their comrade, Jimmy, who had been on the watch there to note when Mordaunt—for it was the actor for whom the roughs were lying in wait—should appear.

"Is he alone, Jimmy?" asked the Slasher, as the rough called Jimmy joined them.

"Yes," replied that worthy, "there he is," and he pointed to a dark form just on the corner of Prince street, that carried in its hands a carpet-bag and a sword.

The actor had played "Claude Melnotte" in the "Lady of Lyons" that night, and the sword was the saber that he had worn when dressed as the French colonel.

"We'll fix him easy, then," said the Slasher.

"Yes, but he's got a sword in his hand," said the rough, who had acted as a spy.

"We'll jump on him so quick that he won't have a chance to use it," said Duke. "Come on, boys, let's keep him in sight."

Then the roughs followed the actor down the street rapidly. But to their surprise and rage, on the corner of Prince street, the actor was joined by two people, a lady and gentleman, who evidently had been waiting for him there. Then the three walked along Prince street, going toward the Bowery.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said the Slasher, indignantly, as he beheld the re-enforcement that his destined victim had received.

"The jig is up!" exclaimed the Englishman.

"Worse luck!" cried the third one of the gang.

"And for to think that we have waited here in the cold all this time!" muttered the thinly-clad rough, in a tone of disgust.

"Wot's to be done, Duke?" asked Jimmy, the spy. "Are we a-goin' to have all our trouble for nothin'?"

"No, I'm blest if we are!" cried the Slasher, in a rage. "We'll go for him anyhow. We're five to two—the woman don't count."

"But she kin holler like blue blazes when we tackle him," said the spy, shrewdly.

"Let 'er holler an' be blowed!" replied the Englishman.

"Yes, but s'pose she brings the perlice down onto us with her screechin'?" suggested the fourth ruffian.

"That would be ugly, now you bet!" exclaimed the rough who was called Jimmy.

"That's so!" said another of the gang.

"Oh, blazes!" cried the Slasher, in disgust; "do yer s'pose it's a-goin' to take us all night for to hit this chap a welt in the head? Let the gal holler, an' if she gets in the way, knock her over into the mud-gutter. I ain't a-goin' to give this job up, now that I've waited all this time. If we five ain't a match for two men an' a woman, then we'd better go an' put our heads in soak right away." The Slasher's tone was one of extreme contempt.

"Well, I ain't afeard for one!" cried the Englishman.

"Nor I! nor I!" chimed in the rest of the gang.

"'Cos, if there's any one that don't like the job, he can just slide right out; there'll be more money for the rest," said the Slasher.

But one and all declared their willingness to go on; so once more, the human birds of prey followed their victims.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN ATTACK AND ITS RESULTS.

THE lady and gentleman who had waited for the actor on the corner of Prince street and Crosby were Crissie Moore and her brother Pony, the street-vender.

It was Mordaunt's last appearance at the theater, and the sewing girl and her brother had attended the performance.

"Let me carry the carpet-bag," said Pony, taking possession of it. "I say you just did bully, to-night. I never see'd any thing more natural in my life. And in the last of it, when you chucked down the pocket-book, full of rocks, for to buy the gal, and blocked the little game of that feller that was arter her, why, I just got right up and howled!"

"Yes, and I felt so ashamed," said Crissie, who had been greatly annoyed by her brother's enthusiasm.

"Why, somebody else hollered, too," said Pony, defending his course.

"Yes, but you made more noise than all the rest," replied Crissie.

"Well, I couldn't help it. I got excited. Of course I knows that it's all sham and make-believe on the stage, but when I sees a nice, innocent gal come out right side up with care, arter going through a lot of trouble, it makes me feel good, and just at the time, why it seems as if it was all real. I likes to go to the the-a-ters, 'cos I always feels better arter it. You see, it's kinder like seeing the inside of a man's own life. The innocent and the good allers comes out first best, and the villain gets particular jessy."

"And how did *you* like the play?" asked the actor of Crissie, who had taken his arm, and was walking demurely at his side. Pony was on the outside of the walk.

"I liked it very much," she answered. "The struggle between pride and love in the girl's heart, when she found that the man she had married—supposing him to be a prince—was only a poor peasant, was so natural."

"But love, you see, conquered at last," said Mordaunt.

"Why, you kin bet on that, every time!" cried Pony. "Just you let a gal fall in love with a young fellow—let her souse in head and heels—why, it don't make a bit of difference what he is, she'll be bound to have him, and the more any one tries to stop it, the more she goes for him. That's a woman's nature."

"Well, I'm sure I don't thank you for the compliment," said Crissie, tartly.

"That's because you know that it's the truth," returned Pony. "You women are all alike, and you're as bad as any of them. I know yer, like a book. If you took a fancy to a fellow, you'd go through thick and thin for him."

"Now I think that is something of a compliment, Miss Crissie," said the actor, laughing. "If I should fall in love with a girl, I should like her to love me that way in return. Not a love only in the sunshine, but a love through storm and gloom. It is care and sorrow that try love, and the pure, true passion alone will stand the test."

"Well, I have never been in love, that I know of, in all my life," said Crissie, in a tone that had a slight degree of hesitation in it; "but I think that, if I did fall in love and got married, I should expect to share my husband's burdens as well as his joys, and that sorrow and care would only make me cling tighter to him."

"You can bet your stamps on it, every time!" cried Pony, emphatically. "Cris is little, but she's spunky, I tell yer."

"Do be quiet," said Crissie, quickly.

"Well, you know you are," returned Pony. "I rayther think you'll make your 'old man' stand round when you get one."

"Why, Pony, how can you say such a thing?" demanded Crissie, a little indignant. "I'm sure that I shall love my husband—that is if I ever get one—and I shall try and be a good little wife. I don't say that I will be one, but I say I'll try. I shan't be afraid of work, and I shall be willing to do my part."

"That is fair!" cried Mordaunt, taking a shy glance at the earnest little face of Crissie.

"Of course it's fair!" exclaimed Pony.

By this time the little party had reached the Bowery. They had been closely followed by the Slasher and his gang.

As the actor and his friends crossed the street, the Slasher and his roughs came close behind him.

"We'll turn down the Bowery, go through Delancy street, and get into Rivington again, ahead of them," said Duke, to his "crowd," as they crossed the street. "Jump,

boys, lively," he said, as he hurried onward; "we got to make three blocks to their one."

At a smart run the Slasher and his gang passed down the Bowery, turned into Delancy street, and went on till they came to Forsyth street, then turned up Forsyth and so got again into Rivington, about half a block ahead of the actor and his companions. They, not dreaming of danger, had walked slowly along, chatting as they went.

"It's all O. K.," said Duke, as his quick eye caught sight of his intended victim coming leisurely down the street. "There's a dark place just beyond Allen street. We'll lay for him there. So come on, boys."

The Slasher and his party hurried forward. Passing Allen street, they came to the dark block that the Slasher had spoken of.

It was admirably suited for the purpose.

A dark entry-way served as a place of concealment for two of the roughs. Two more hid behind a coal-box, in front of a grocery store.

"Now," said the Slasher, "I'll walk up the street, then come back slowly, so as to meet our man right here; then you jump on him."

"We've to finish him if we can, eh?" asked the Englishman.

"Yes, that's the programme," coolly returned the Slasher. "Mind, don't all go for the actor; two of you welt the other feller—you two behind the coal-box. The other two and I will settle the actor chap. Don't miss him, now."

"I wish I was as sure of a five-pound note—and that's about thirty dollars of your money—as I am of settling this bloke," said the Englishman, swinging a sand-club carelessly in his hand; that is, a long canvas bag filled with sand; a most dangerous weapon, and one greatly in use in England by the garroters and burglars.

"Oh, we'll fix him easy enough!" cried the rough known as Jimmy, drawing a "life-preserver" from his pocket—another English weapon—a ball of lead incased with leather, and with a little handle, also of leather. Few men live to tell of being struck by it.

"All right, boys; keep your eyes peeled." And with this parting admonition the Slasher sauntered down the street.

As he walked onward he drew his weapon—an ugly-looking slung-shot—from his pocket.

"Let me see," he mused, "three hundred for the job. There's forty to pay the fellers; that leaves me two hundred and sixty. That's a tidy little sum for a night's work, and an easy one, too; 'cos we kin lay him out in about two minutes. A werry nice little job. I wish I could git four or five more, just like it."

Then the Slasher turned round and commenced to walk back again, slowly; timing his gait so as to arrive in front of the ambush of his gang, at the same instant as the actor and his friends, who, totally unconscious of danger, were coming along chatting together.

"We are nearly home," said Mordaunt, as they came on.

"Yes, I shall be glad," observed Crissie, "for I'm quite tired."

"Well, I ain't," said Pony.

"You don't sit at a sewing-machine all day long," replied Crissie.

"Well, I knows it, but I sells 'taters, an' the way I hollers is a caution to weak nerves. Then I looks after January too, an' that hoss is a heap of trouble now, I tell you."

Then the three saw the Slasher advancing carelessly up the street, but of course paid no heed to the fact.

The actor and his party met the Slasher just before they got to the grocery. The Slasher passed them, then quickly turned and made a blow at Mordaunt's head with the slung-shot, and at the same time he shouted to his gang:

"Go fur 'em, boys!"

The roughs sprung from their hiding-places, weapons in hand.

The Slasher had miscalculated the distance, and his blow, intended to fell the actor to the ground, missed him. Before he could recover himself, the actor's saber flashed from the scabbard, and the bright blade whirling through the air, slashed Duke across the face, cutting his cheek and nose open, and hurling him into the gutter bleeding and senseless.

Pony, quick as New York boys generally are, comprehended the attack in an instant. He floored the first ruffian with the carpet-bag, saluted the second one with a tremendous kick in the stomach, which doubled him up in speechless agony upon the pavement. The third rough took to his heels

at once, without waiting to participate in the encounter, after beholding the reception of his comrades.

The Englishman had approached behind Mordaunt, when he had turned to encounter the Slasher, and with a tremendous blow of his sand-club would, beyond a doubt, have settled the actor for this world, had not Crissie perceived his intention, and throwing up her arm received the whole weight of the blow upon it. With a shrill scream of pain, the poor girl sunk down at the feet of the man whose life she had saved. The rough took to his heels and ran for dear life.

The encounter had ended. Three of the roughs lay disabled on the pavement or in the gutter.

With a cry of horror, the actor raised the senseless form of Crissie from the ground.

"She is killed!" he cried.

"No, she only fainted; she got the blow on her arm; bring her into the house!" exclaimed Pony.

"And these fellows?" said Mordaunt, as he bore the light form of Crissie in his arm down the street.

"Better let 'em be. We don't want to mix 'up in the muss. It's John Duke, the Slasher, and his Baxter street gang. I know 'em. They have mistook us for somebody else, 'cos of course they ain't got any thing ag'in' us," said Pony, as they walked rapidly down the street.

But a suspicion haunted the mind of the actor that it was not accident, but another well-planned attack upon his life, and he easily guessed from whose hand came the blow.

Crissie was conveyed into the house, placed upon the bed in her cosy little room, that so strongly showed the neatness of its occupant, and a doctor was sent for. He came, examined Crissie's arm—by this time she had recovered from her faint—pronounced it a simple fracture, and said that it would soon be well, and in a few weeks she could again use it.

Great was the joy of both Mordaunt and her brother when they learned that Crissie's hurt was far from being a dangerous one in its nature.

And as for Mr. John Duke and his companions, they picked themselves up with many curses, and slowly proceeded homeward to their dens in the heart of the bloody Sixth ward.

The slash that Duke had received across the face bled profusely, and did not add to that worthy's beauty. He cursed his ill-luck with many a bitter oath.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SPRINGING THE TRAP.

LAWYER CHUBBET drove Blanche up the avenue, then into Harlem lane, taking Central Park on the way.

Being a beautiful afternoon the road was gay with dashing teams—brilliant with youth and beauty.

As they drove along, the old lawyer shrewdly questioned Blanche to discover if she was in love with any one. He had an idea that she might have seen some one that she preferred to Allyne. If that was so, it would easily explain why she was so resolute not to fulfill the engagement. But, after a series of skillfully put questions, Chubbet became satisfied that she was heart-free, and that she had given her only reason for not wishing to become the wife of Strathroy.

They drove over King's bridge, and went a short distance beyond, then turned, and, crossing the bridge again, drove toward the Hudson river.

"By the way, my dear Miss Blanche, I have an old friend, who lives a short distance from here, that I should like to call upon, if you have no objections," Chubbet said, in his usual way.

"Oh, no, I have no objections," she replied.

"It's Doctor Fondell, a very able man, indeed, though he has retired from active practice now," explained the lawyer.

"I think by the way, now that we are going to visit the doctor, I shall ask him to give me a prescription for you; something to bring the color back into your cheeks again. Don't you think that is a good idea, eh?"

"Yes," replied Blanche, a faint smile coming to her lips.

"Egad!" cried Chubbet, merrily, "I think that it is an excellent idea. I shall have to carry it out."

"If you think that it will do any good, do so, by all means," said Blanche, who had little faith in any remedy known to the professors of the healing art, to cure the heart-ache that had stolen the roses from her cheeks and furrowed her fair brow with lines of care.

"Here we are," said Chubbet, as he drew up the grays in front of a house half hid by trees.

The house sat some hundred paces back from the road, and was surrounded by quite an extensive garden, filled with shrubbery. The garden was in turn surrounded by a high brick wall, that gave an air of seclusion to the place and grounds.

As the carriage halted before the gate, a tall, robust-looking gentleman of forty or forty-five, with a long, red beard, and slightly bald, came out. He was bare-headed, as though he had just come out for a stroll through the garden.

"Why, Mr. Chubbet," he cried, warmly, as he advanced; "this is a pleasure."

The lawyer descended to the ground and assisted Blanche to alight.

"This is Doctor Fondell, Blanche," he said. "Miss Blanche Maybury—Doctor Fondell."

"I am truly delighted to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, Miss Maybury," said the doctor, bowing profoundly.

"We were out for a drive—Miss Blanche is not very well—and I thought that as we were passing, we would just call in for a moment," said the lawyer.

"I am glad you have done so," said the doctor, with an air of great cordiality. "Pray step into the house."

"Certainly," replied the lawyer.

The doctor led the way through the garden into the house and conducted them to a pleasant-looking apartment on the second floor.

"Will you allow me to offer you a glass of native wine after your ride—some of my own make—not strong, but quite refreshing?" the doctor said, in his smooth way.

"If it will not give you too much trouble," Blanche replied.

"Trouble!" cried the doctor; "not the least in the world. Besides, you are under my care now, and I prescribe it for you, and of course you must obey your doctor."

"Yes, Miss Blanche," said Chubbet, "while you are under the doctor's roof, of course you are under his charge and must obey him. Ha—ha!"

"Of course," replied Blanche, smiling. "I shall be very obedient."

"I will get you your wine, Miss Blanche," said the doctor, about to leave the room.

"Stop a minute, doctor," cried Chubbet. "I would like to see that famous wine-cellar that you have spoken of so often; that is, if Miss Blanche will permit me to leave her alone for a few minutes," and he bowed gallantly to the young lady.

"Oh, yes," replied Blanche.

"For the present, then, good-by," and Chubbet followed the doctor out, and they closed the door behind them.

"Won't she be apt to get out?" asked the lawyer, after the door had closed.

"Oh, no!" replied the doctor, smiling, and showing his white teeth. "The door is locked already. It is a spring lock, fastens with a catch, and opens from the outside only. She is already in her cage."

"You have it capitally arranged here," said the old lawyer, in admiration.

"Pretty well—pretty well," replied the doctor, with an air of satisfaction.

"I don't know whether we will be able to persuade her into the marriage or not," said the lawyer, thoughtfully.

"You may rely upon it that you will not," said the doctor, in his smooth, soft voice, that bore a disagreeable resemblance to the purring of a cat.

"You think not?"

"Yes. When a young, high-spirited girl, of the style of Miss Blanche, makes up her mind not to marry a man, she is apt to hold to her resolution."

"Then we must do without her consent!" said the lawyer, after thinking for a moment.

"Exactly. When you get ready to have the marriage take place, notify me, and I will put Miss Blanche into such a condition that if she will not say yes, she can not say no."

"How can you do that?"

"By means of a drug, administered in her wine or in her tea. I will answer for its success," said the doctor, with one of his smooth smiles, that were so full of meaning.

"Very well. I will let you know in ample time," said the lawyer.

Then the two went down-stairs; drank a glass of wine together, and Chubbet, getting into his carriage, drove off.

"I think that was very neatly performed," he said, with an air of great satisfaction.

The doctor watched his visitor depart; then taking a glass of wine, proceeded up-stairs.

He found Blanche seated exactly as he had left her. Indeed, she had not stirred. Alone, her thoughts were full of gloomy images.

"Here is the wine, my dear," said the doctor, handing her the glass. "Drink; it will do you good."

Blanche drank the wine, mechanically, while the doctor sat down by her side.

"You do not seem to be well. Will you permit me to examine your pulse?" he asked.

Without a word, Blanche extended her hand to him.

"As I expected," he said, after a moment. "My dear, you are quite unwell."

"Yes; but, doctor, it is more mental than physical illness," she said.

"Exactly, my dear; and I trust that, after being a few days under my care, you will improve both mentally and physically. I hope you are pleased with your room here."

"With my room?" questioned Blanche, in wonder.

"Yes, with your room. Here is your bedroom," and the doctor opened a door in the left wall. "There is the bell. If you wish for any thing, ring for it. Your meals will be sent to your room."

Blanche began to think that either she was in a horrible dream, or that she was talking with a lunatic.

"Why, what do you mean, sir?" she cried; "and where is Mr. Chubbet?"

"He is now on his way to the city."

"Without me?"

"Certainly, my dear young lady. His object in coming was to leave you here."

"I can not understand this!" exclaimed Blanche in horror.

"Why, it is plain enough, my dear. Your health is affected; your friends feared for you. They thought that you needed rest and quiet more even than a physician's care, and so they have placed you under my treatment. Were you not aware of this?" asked the doctor, in affected amazement.

"No, sir," replied Blanche, unable as yet to guess the full extent of the trap into which she had fallen.

"That is strange," said the doctor, as if astonished at the circumstance, "but I understand it now; they did not wish to excite you, and thought, I suppose, that the explanation had better come from me."

"Not wish to excite me?" repeated Blanche; "what is the meaning of this?"

"Why, my dear child, you are subject to fits of insanity, and your friends have placed you under my care until you recover your reason."

"I insane?" exclaimed Blanche, springing to her feet in alarm; "oh, I guess it now! And your house is—"

"A private lunatic asylum," replied the doctor.

For a moment Blanche stood like one stunned. She had not foreseen this blow. Too late the truth came to her. She was in the hands of daring and unscrupulous men, who would not hesitate to use any means to accomplish their purpose.

"And do you believe that I am not in my right senses?" she asked, looking the doctor straight in the eye.

"Yes, my dear, I can see it in your eyes plainly."

Poor Blanche was in terrible hands.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK," ETC.

LYSANDER CHUBBET had just entered his office, returning from lunch. He had eaten heartily and felt at peace with himself and all the world.

Drawing his cushioned chair to the window, he sat down and lit a fragrant cigar, prepared for an hour or so of uninterrupted enjoyment.

But as the old saying hath it, "Man proposes and fate disposes." No sooner had lawyer Chubbet lit his cigar and settled down comfortably in his chair, than he was disturbed by a knock at the door.

"Come in," said the lawyer, rather annoyed at being disturbed, and his annoyance was not diminished when the

door opened and Timothy Weisel, the notorious, if not celebrated, legal gentleman from Center street, entered.

Mr. Chubbet was tolerably well acquainted with the Tombs lawyer, both personally and by reputation, and if there was a member of the legal fraternity that Lysander Chubbet despised thoroughly, it was Timothy Weisel.

"Good-day, Mr. Chubbet," said the pettifogger, with a profound bow.

"Good-day, sir," said Chubbet, very cold and distant.

"Pleasant day, sir," said the other.

"Very," replied Chubbet, shortly and dryly, at the same time wondering what on earth Weisel wanted with him.

"I hope you are enjoying good health, Mr. Chubbet?" said Weisel, with another bow.

"Tolerable, sir," responded Chubbet, dryer than ever, and wondering why Weisel didn't state his business.

"I am glad to hear it. The illness of such a man as yourself, Mr. Chubbet, would be a great blow to the profession of which you are an honored, and I an unworthy member," said the Tombs lawyer, pathetically, and with another profound bow.

Within himself Chubbet shuddered when this speech fell upon his ears. He knew the pettifogger well, and understood that this politeness was but the prelude to an attack, something as the prize-fighters shake hands before pounding each other into jelly.

Rapidly the old lawyer ran his thoughts into the past few years. He could not remember a single circumstance with which the seedy-dressed legal gentleman, who had called upon him, could possibly have any connection.

"He means mischief, I know; but about what?" thought the lawyer.

Weisel, finding that Chubbet did not reply, went on in his speech.

"Permit me to offer my congratulations that your health is good, Mr. Chubbet," said Weisel, with another profound bow. "Would it be taking too great a liberty if I took a chair and sat down in your office, Mr. Chubbet?" asked the little lawyer, in an extremely deferential tone.

"Well, if you have business—" said the old lawyer, crustily.

"I have, Mr. Chubbet; business of great importance, Mr. Chubbet," and the wily little fellow glided into a chair, rather than sat down in it. "And it gives me great pleasure, Mr. Chubbet, when I think that the nature of that business will bring me into contact—I may say, daily contact—with a gentleman so renowned in the legal profession as yourself, Mr. Chubbet."

Chubbet felt a cold shudder run all over him. He knew very well that he did not deserve the high encomiums which the pettifogger was bestowing upon him, and he took it as a warning of danger.

"Well, sir, your business?" Chubbet said, abruptly.

"Certainly. I suppose that you have not forgotten that one Clinton Strathroy disappeared some twenty or more years ago."

"Of course not," replied Chubbet, who couldn't imagine what the other was after in dragging up the mysterious disappearance of Clinton Strathroy.

"This Clinton Strathroy was worth at the time of his sudden disappearance some hundred thousand dollars."

"Yes," replied Chubbet, "there or thereabouts."

"I accept the correction, Mr. Chubbet," said Weisel, with another profound bow. "One hundred thousand dollars—there or thereabouts. Well." Here Weisel coughed as if to clear his throat, while Chubbet watched him in blank amazement. "You were, I believe, Mr. Strathroy's lawyer?"

"Yes."

"You hold the same position in regard to his son, known as Allyne Strathroy?"

"Yes," again said Chubbet, who was beginning to get impatient, and who couldn't for the life of him, see the drift of these questions.

"Now, I am about to state a few facts. If I am wrong in any of them—if my facts are not facts—please correct me."

"But I don't see the reason—"

"Excuse me, my dear Mr. Chubbet," interrupted Weisel, in his most insinuating voice. "If you will only have patience for a few minutes you will see the reason. Believe me, I should not take up the time—the valuable time of so eminent a practitioner as yourself, without good and sufficient reason. Now for my facts. Some time after Clinton Strathroy's disappearance, the belief became general that he was

dead. Continued advertisements did not produce him, either living or dead. Clinton Strathroy left a will. In due time—in the belief that he was dead—that will was admitted to probate. Under that will Allyne, the son of Clinton Strathroy and Virginia, his wife—formerly Virginia Courtney, of Charleston, South Carolina—inherited all his father's property. Have I been in error in any of my statements?"

"No, sir," replied Chubbet, who began to believe that his visitor was under the influence of liquor or crazy in dragging up all these old facts. "These things, sir, I presume, are familiar to all that know any thing about the Strathroy family at all."

"Ex-actly," said Weisel, slowly and reflectively. "Then I haven't made any mistakes in my statements?"

"No, sir," said Chubbet, impatiently. He began to wish his visitor at the bottom of the East river, or, in fact, anywhere out of his office.

"By the way, I don't suppose that you have a copy of the will of Clinton Strathroy—under which this son, Allyne, inherits his father's property—handy, have you?" said Weisel, suddenly.

Chubbet stared at the odd question.

"Of course not, sir," he answered, impatiently. "Why should I keep a copy of the will? The affair was all settled up years ago, and young Mr. Allyne put in possession of his father's property."

"Of the property *supposed* to be left to him by this will, that I have spoken of?" said Weisel.

"Are you out of your senses, sir," asked Chubbet, indignantly. "There is no supposition about it. The estate was left, without any reservation whatever, to this son—his only son, Allyne Strathroy."

"His only son—ah! um!" and Weisel looked in a mysterious way at Chubbet, who instantly cast his eyes about him for a weapon, for he really began to think that he was talking with a lunatic.

"Then you haven't a copy of the will?"

"No, sir."

"Luckily I have," said Weisel, in a dry way, as he drew from his pocket a paper, much to Chubbet's astonishment, who couldn't possibly conceive what any one could want of a copy of Strathroy's will, when the estate had been settled up years before.

"I suppose you will remember, when I read this paper, whether it is a true copy of the will or not?" the Tombs lawyer said.

"I should rather think so, sir, considering that I drew the original will out." Chubbet now began to have a curiosity to find out the reason for all this—to him—extraordinary proceeding.

Weisel unfolded the paper.

"First comes the usual, 'sound mind, etc.,"' began Weisel; "then a list of his property, and then the bequest, 'to my eldest son, Allyne Strathroy.' Is that correct?"

"Quite correct," replied Chubbet.

"Ah—why did Strathroy say my eldest son? he had but one—did he?" asked Weisel.

"A mere figure of speech, that's all. The will is perfectly clear," said Chubbet, still in a maze.

"Never has been disputed, eh?"

"Of course not."

"Can't be disputed, eh?"

"Decidedly not."

"Then all Allyne Strathroy had to do was to prove his identity as *Allyne Strathroy*, the eldest son of Clinton Strathroy, and take possession of the Strathroy estate?"

"Exactly."

"And Allyne Strathroy did do this, and now holds the estate?"

"Precisely."

"There is no flaw whatever in this will, then?"

"None at all."

"Suppose, for instance, that Clinton Strathroy had had another son, but not born in wedlock, a year or so younger than this Allyne, would his claim be worth any thing—could he break this will?"

"Why, what nonsense you are talking!" cried Chubbet, impatiently. "What is the use of asking such foolish questions? You know, as well as I do, that this will is perfect."

"Well, yes, I thought so," said Weisel, a singular smile playing around the corners of his thin-lipped mouth. "But I had a curiosity to know your opinion upon the subject."

"Well, sir, you have it. The will can not be broken if

Clinton Strathroy had one natural son or fifty natural sons. Allyne's right under this will can not be disputed." Then a sudden ray of light illuminated the lawyer's mind. "I suppose that this natural son of Clinton Strathroy that you speak of does really exist, and that you represent him?"

"Oh, bless you, no," said Weisel. "There is a natural son, but I'm retained on the other side."

"The other side! What other side?"

"In the case of Allyne Strathroy *vs.* Allyne Strathroy."

"What do you mean?" said Chubbet, in astonishment.

"That Clinton Strathroy had two sons, both named Allyne. One born in Charleston, South Carolina, on the 20th of January, 1847; the other born in New York, on the 25th of November, 1847; the second Allyne just ten months younger than the first Allyne. Not only that, but Clinton Strathroy married the mother of the second child, Virginia Courtney, while his first wife, Lizzie Duke, was still alive. The will says, 'my eldest son, Allyne Strathroy.' You have just informed me that there can not be a doubt in regard to the will standing, even though there were fifty natural sons. I represent Allyne Strathroy, the elder—the legitimate son; you act for Allyne Courtney—not Strathroy—for he has no right to his father's name—the usurper."

Chubbet gazed at Weisel utterly helpless.

CHAPTER XXV.

A BARGAIN BETWEEN TWO RASCALS.

For a few minutes Chubbet remained silent, apparently speechless, and looked at the wily Tombs lawyer. On his countenance consternation was visible.

At last Chubbet regained his speech.

"Why, you infernal scoundrel!" he cried.

"What? what is that you say?" demanded Weisel, bristling up and preparing to show fight. "Take care, sir, how you asperse my character!"

"Your character!" cried Chubbet, surveying the little lawyer with a look which he intended to render withering in its indignation. But, the look had no effects whatever on Weisel. He was not to be "withered" easily.

"Yes, my character!" repeated Weisel.

"You never had any character!" cried Chubbet, naturally angry at being "pumped" in the complete and scientific manner that he had been by the pettifogger.

"I've as much character as you ever had!" exclaimed Weisel, who was not to be bullied.

"Your character—bah!" cried Chubbet, in contempt. "You miserable, half-starved Tombs shyster you!"

"And what are you?" retorted Weisel. "An overgrown vampire, that has got fat on the money you have robbed your clients of!"

Chubbet got purple with passion.

"To be insulted in my own office, by such a thing as this!" he exclaimed, raising his eyes upward, as if addressing some mysterious and potent spirit resident in the ceiling. "A wretch, who, when his unfortunate client hasn't got any thing else, will even take the very shirt from his back to satisfy his claims."

"And you!" exclaimed Weisel, in a passion, "what do you do? You don't leave your client any thing at all. You rob him with the cool effrontery of a faithful steward, when you are simply betraying every confidence reposed in you. Many an heir is now walking about New York penniless, simply because you had the settling of his property and 'gobbled' it all in the settlement. No wonder your clients say you ought to be called Grab-it instead of Chubbet."

"Wretch!" cried Chubbet, enraged beyond endurance at this attack upon his probity, "mean, miserable wretch! I've half a mind to crush you on the spot!" And Chubbet, rising, seized a large law-book and poised it in the air as if about to heave it at the head of the pettifogger.

Weisel was not at all alarmed by this hostile demonstration, but lay back in his chair and laughed.

"You'd make a capital tragedian—a much better tragedian than a lawyer. Now, when you get through with your gymnastic exercises, perhaps you'll be kind enough to settle down quietly and talk business."

"I will have no business transactions with you, sir!" exclaimed Chubbet, laying down his book and coming to the conclusion that his visitor was not to be bullied.

"Just as you please," said Weisel, coolly. "I shall have some business transaction with you before you're a week

older—that is, if you continue to represent Mr. Allyne Court-nay, known now as Mr. Allyne Strathroy.”

“Do you suppose, sir, for a single instant, that any court in the known world would listen to this ridiculous cock-and-bull story about the Strathroy family?” asked Chubbet.

“Yes, I do suppose so,” said Weisel. “You ought to know that I feel pretty sure of my case by engaging in it, for it is quite outside my usual line of practice.”

“Case!” growled Chubbet; “you have no case.”

“If you will take the trouble to cast your eyes over this paper—it’s only a copy, by the way—you will soon see whether I have a case or not.” And Weisel took a paper from an inside pocket and handed it to Chubbet. He opened it.

It was a marriage certificate, and the contracting parties were Clinton Strathroy and Lizzie Duke. The date, New York city, March 30th, 1846.

Then Weisel handed him another paper.

It was a record of baptism.

“Allyne Strathroy, son of Clinton Strathroy and Lizzie, his wife. Charleston, South Carolina. April 22d, 1847.”

“What do you think of my case now?” asked Weisel, with a quiet smile.

“Bah! these papers are fabrications; you can not prove them to be genuine,” said Chubbet, slowly, but at the same time he could not help confessing to himself that the papers had an “ugly” look.

“Oh, are they?” said the pettifogger, quietly. “Well, there’s one thing certain. It won’t take long to discover whether they are genuine or not. I think they *are* genuine, because I have in person seen the minister who married the couple, and the two witnesses to the marriage; also, the doctor who attended Mrs. Strathroy—the first—through her illness, and the clergyman who baptized her child. Luckily for my client, Mr. Allyne Strathroy, the first, all the parties are alive. I suppose that even you will confess that if my client can prove the marriage of his mother and the date of his birth, and his own identity as Allyne Strathroy, nothing on earth can prevent him from coming into possession of his father’s estate, under the bequest of the will, which distinctly says, ‘to my eldest son, Allyne Strathroy.’ Of course, if he proves the facts that I have stated to *be facts*, he is the elder son by a good twelve months.”

“I will admit nothing, sir,” cried Chubbet, hastily; “it is unprofessional, sir. Your conduct, sir, is unprofessional—in the highest degree unprofessional—in coming to me at all.”

“Do you think so?”

“Yes, sir, I do.”

“Mr. Chubbet, you are a man of the world. I use the term, ‘man of the world,’ to indicate a man who don’t care a snap for anybody but himself, and who will not hesitate to put a good round sum of money into his pocket—even if it is done in a manner that, possibly, the honest men in the world would say was no better than robbery—as long as it is done quietly.”

“I don’t see the drift of your remarks, sir,” said Chubbet, looking askance at the pettifogger.

“Allow me to explain,” said Weisel. “The Strathroy property is entirely out of your hands, is it not?”

“Entirely,” answered Chubbet.

“Then, of course—friendship aside—for in business, you know, friendship does not exist—it doesn’t make two cents’ worth of difference to you, whether Mr. Allyne Strathroy holds this property, or Mr. John Smith, or anybody else?”

“No, sir, it does not.”

“Ah—well, I thought not,” said Weisel, with an air of satisfaction. “Now we are coming to the reason why I have visited you this afternoon—why I have ‘interviewed’ you, as a newspaper-reporter would say.”

Chubbet thought to himself that, if “interviewing” consisted in getting on the blind side of a man, leading him into a skillfully-prepared trap, and making him make a donkey of himself generally, he had been pretty thoroughly “interviewed” by the Tombs lawyer.

“Now then, Mr. Chubbet, I want you to examine into the justice of my client’s claim to this Strathroy estate. Do it fully. Examine the papers—the witnesses. Put us through a rigid cross-examination. We can stand it. And if in the end you are convinced—as convinced you surely will be—that the Allyne Strathroy whom I represent has the undoubted legal right to this estate under the will of the father, Clinton Strathroy—”

“Well, supposing that I am convinced, what then?”

asked Chubbet, whose keen scent detected “money” in this transaction.

“What would be your duty, as an honest man, toward your client, Mr. Allyne Strathroy No. 2?” demanded Weisel. “I will answer that question for you,” he continued; “an answer it as I myself would answer, should a similar question be put to me. If I discovered that my case was weak—that the opposing party had really a legal and a just claim; that, in fact, my client hadn’t a leg to stand on, I should feel it my imperative duty, as an honest lawyer, to say to my client, ‘*compromise it.*’”

“Ah—um!” Chubbet understood the game now.

“But you will naturally ask,” continued Weisel, “why—if I am so sure of my case—why should I consent to a compromise? I will explain. Of course my client has no money. I get the affair started with my funds. Once started, the rest is easy enough. After the thing is settled, supposing my client to have won, he will not be apt to want to pay me what my services are worth. Now, if you bring your client to consent to a compromise, I go to mine and say to him: ‘Your case is weak; if we carry it on we shall be apt to get beaten. The other party offers to compromise; I have frightened them; take the money and drop the case. Here’s ten thousand dollars for you’—or whatever the sum is. He takes it, of course, and the affair is ended. I pay you a handsome sum for your valuable services in the matter, and put the rest of the compromise-money into my own pocket. You see, it is a strictly honorable transaction from beginning to end, and we have acted as honest men toward our clients, and advised them solely for their own good.”

Chubbet bowed in the affirmative.

This was a scheme after his own heart.

“How much am I to receive?” he asked.

“I thought that ten thousand dollars would be about the fair thing,” replied Weisel.

“Yes, that will be satisfactory,” said Chubbet, after thinking for a moment. “But I fear it will be difficult to persuade my Mr. Allyne into a compromise. He’s a terribly obstinate fellow.”

“Let him examine the proofs—the witnesses,” replied Weisel. “He’ll be speedily convinced that he really hasn’t got the shadow of a claim to the Strathroy property. Of course, when that fact is patent to him, he will be very glad to have the chance to have some of his money by a compromise.”

“Certainly. I’ll see Mr. Strathroy and let him know of this. I now see that it is my duty to advise him to compromise it at once.”

“That ends our interview,” said Weisel, rising. “The witnesses and papers are ready for your client’s inspection at any time. You know where my office is.”

“Yes,” and Chubbet rose. “By the way, you will overlook my hasty remarks a few minutes ago?”

“Certainly,” replied Weisel. “I trust you will forgive my expressions derogatory to your character.”

“Of course. By-the-by, how much is the compromise for? I forgot to ask.”

“Half the estate—fifty thousand dollars.”

“And ten thousand out of that for me?”

“Yes. Good-day, Mr. Chubbet.”

The bargain was made.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW CRISSIE WAS PAID.

It was on the day following the night that Duke the Slasher and his gang had made their attack on the actor and his friends, that Mordaunt sat by the bedside of Crissie.

Although she was not dangerously hurt, yet the doctor had recommended perfect quiet for a few days.

It was a hard task for Crissie to lie still, brisk, bustling little woman that she was. Always active, always at work, she could not have possibly remained quiet, had not the actor sat by the bedside, caring for her as though she had been a sick child instead of a woman, and “petting” her in a way that Crissie Moore never before had known in all her life.

There was a subtle magnetism about the actor; a some-

thing in the glance of his dark eye, an electric thrill in the touch of his cold, white hand, when carelessly he passed it across her forehead, that Crissie wondered at, and which seemed to draw her closer and closer to him, even despite herself. Yet she did not struggle against the feeling, but yielded to it. At times she felt as if she was in a trance—a delirium that she could not account for. The whole room seemed to swim around her; she could see naught but the great dark eyes of the man who sat so patiently by her bedside. Those eyes, so soft in their liquid brightness, so glorious in their rays of fire.

And often, as Crissie looked into the pale, careworn face of the actor, noted the dark lines beneath the eyes; the slight hollow in the cheeks; the handsome, but irresolute mouth that concealed the white teeth, so perfect in their beauty; the broad, pale forehead that told of genius and of mental power, she wondered if he was so strangely fascinating now, when only a wreck of what he once must have been, how he had looked when in his prime of youth before the demon, dissipation, had dragged him down.

Mordaunt had been either reading or reciting from memory—which was richly stored with many a strange old ballad—to Crissie, all the morning.

The girl lay with her eyes half closed and listened with delight, while Mordaunt's musical voice gave double point to some charming love story, like Whittier's "Amy Wentworth," or rung out, clear as the clarion's note, as he told, "how they held the bridge in the brave days of old."

Crissie, whose life had been one long, desperate struggle with poverty, if it had never known what it was to be pited and caressed, so it had been barren as a sand-reach of all the sweet influences which intellectual pleasures bring.

It was a delightful sensation. She liked it. The novelty pleased her. To be petted, too, by a man like Mordaunt, whose touch was as gentle as that of a woman's, and whom she already looked up to, as being better than the rest of mankind, despite his faults, was blissful indeed.

Women are apt to make heroes of the men they love; it is their nature, and nature will have its way in spite of all the "rights" in the world.

Crissie Moore was in love with Mordaunt, though she did not know it herself. She knew that she liked him. That liking prompted her to throw herself beneath the blow of the rough to save him. But, she had never questioned her feelings. She did not know what it was that made it seem so pleasant to have the actor sit by her bedside. She had not tried to discover. In fact, she had never thought of analyzing her happiness. Enough for her—happy little woman—that she was happy. She did not question why.

"Ain't you tired of hearing me read, Crissie?" Mordaunt said, laying down the book.

"Oh, no," she answered, quickly, her eyes shining as bright as twin stars; "I am very fond of hearing any one read. Besides you read books that I never heard of before, and they are so real interesting." The actor had just finished "Romeo and Juliet." "But doesn't it tire you to read to me?"

"Why, no, Cris," and the white hand of the actor pushed back the silken, odd-colored hair from the girl's low forehead in a caressing way. "You forget that it is my business to use my voice constantly. Once I had a voice that could stand any amount of toil. I could get through a part like Macbeth in Shakespeare's tragedy, where there is a terrible strain upon the voice, and yet it would be as fresh at the end of the play as at the beginning."

"And is it not so now?" Crissie asked. She had captured the hand upon her temples and was pressing it softly between her own little palms.

"No," answered Mordaunt, a touch of sadness in his tones that went straight to Crissie's heart. "I have to be very careful of my voice; spare it all I can. The voice, you know, is the great charm of the actor, or, in fact, of any public speaker."

Crissie in her heart thought that there wasn't such another voice as Mordaunt's in all the world.

"Don't you find it dull sitting here with poor little me?" Crissie asked, looking shyly into his face with her bright blue eyes.

"Dull with you, Crissie!" said Mordaunt, reproachfully. "Why, how can you ask that, you dear little woman? Didn't you risk your life last night to save mine. Oh, Cris, I wish I had met you before—say five years ago. I was a different man then to what I am now. Drink and dissipation had not laid their hands upon me. I was not then a mere wreck of a man."

"Why, Edmund," she said, softly, carrying his thin white hand to her lips and kissing it, playfully, "you must not speak like that. There are a great many in the world far worse than you. Besides, you have changed now. Since you have been with us, you have been steady, and you can hardly imagine how you have changed for the better in that short time. Why, last night, in the theater, two gentlemen, who sat in front of me were speaking of you, and one said to the other, 'Mordaunt is looking about as well as he used to;' and the other replied, 'yes.' They had evidently known you in the past, and they did not notice any great change."

"That was on the stage," replied the actor. "The foot-lights make a great difference in one's appearance. They make the old look young, and the ugly look handsome. But, as I was saying, Cris, if I had known a nice little woman—like you—years ago, that nice little woman might have altered the course of my life considerably, and it would have been for the better too, Cris."

"Do you think so?" she said, and she wished in all her heart that she had known Mordaunt years before. And the thought came into her mind, that, perhaps, if such had been the case, she would have been happier too.

"Yes, I do indeed," he answered. "By the way, Cris, how am I going to pay you for saving my life; for you did save it. If that fellow's blow had fallen on my head instead of on your arm, I should not have been sitting here to-day by your side."

"I don't know," Crissie said, shyly. And the white lids and golden lashes come down over the blue eyes. But, in the day-dream of the girl, there came a thought of how she would like to be paid for the life that she had saved; but she would not have spoken that thought for worlds. It seemed so improbable—so impossible that the wish could be fulfilled.

"But, Cris, I must pay you in some way," Mordaunt said, earnestly; "perhaps my life isn't worth much, being half wasted already; but it still is very dear to me. And now I think of it, it must be dear to some one else, only in a different way. I want to preserve it, and the other wants to destroy it."

"Why, what do you mean?" and Crissie's eyes opened wide.

"My life has been attempted twice within the last two weeks," Mordaunt answered.

"Your life attempted?"

"Yes, twice some one has tried to murder me. The first time they tried poison, but my system was so saturated with alcohol that the poison was in some measure counter-acted; so that plan failed. That was the time that I became acquainted with your brother. The second time was last night. Your brother thought that the attack was the result of a mistake; that is, that the roughs mistook us for somebody else. I did not think so. I am convinced that it was another blow aimed at my life. The fellows were evidently in waiting for me. Pony and you being with me alone defeated the plan."

"But why should any one desire your death, Edmund?" asked Crissie, in wonder.

"I hardly know myself," replied Mordaunt, thoughtfully. "But I can guess the reason. There was a murder committed in Baxter street only a little while ago, and the murderer escaped unknown. Through a strange combination of circumstances, the murderer was, I think, revealed to me. He at the same time, by some means, guessed that I knew his fearful secret; hence he has attempted to take my life, and thus, by a second crime, conceal the first."

"But why do you not denounce this man to the police?" was Crissie's natural question.

"Because I haven't proof enough yet, but I am collecting it, slowly, link by link; soon I hope to complete the chain, and then my turn will come."

"But you must be careful, or he may succeed in killing you," said Crissie, looking in the actor's face, anxiously.

"I shall take care of myself hereafter," Mordaunt said, significantly. "I shall go armed in the future, and probably in disguise. Thanks to my art of acting, I can do that easy enough. But, Crissie," and the actor bent over the bed and looked full in the upturned face of the young girl, "you haven't told me yet, how I can pay you for saving my life."

"I don't want any pay," and Crissie, closing her eyes, evaded the gaze of Mordaunt.

"I am not going to be satisfied with that," said the actor, softly, and touching the girl's white forehead with his

lips—a pure and holy kiss, that thrilled Crissie's heart with joy. "Oh, Cris!" he said, looking with eyes full of love into the little face of the girl, "if I had only known you five years ago, when I held up my head proudly in the world. If this had happened then, I should have asked you to take in payment for the service, myself—to take the life that you had saved and make it happy, forever more."

Oh! how the low, sweet words filled Crissie's soul with joy. She could hardly believe her hearing.

"Edmund," she said, unclosing her eyes a little and looking up into Mordaunt's face.

"But now," he continued, "I will not ask you to share the, perhaps, wretched lot of a man so broken in fortune as I am. But, Crissie, I can be a brother to you—a kind and loving brother."

For a moment Crissie looked Mordaunt in the face.

"I don't want a brother," she said, and then she turned her face away from him and looked at the wall.

The simple sentence—the flushed, grieved face of the girl, told Mordaunt the truth at once. He passed his arm gently under the little head and turned the face again to him.

"Crissie, will you be my dear little wife?"

"Yes," she answered, promptly, her face beaming with joy, and she held up her lips to seal the bargain.

Crissie never had such a kiss before.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A LAWYER'S TRICK.

FOR three days Blanche had been in her prison, for such she rightly considered it. And during the three days she had seen no one except Doctor Fondell and a woman of middle age, who attended to her rooms.

Blanche's mind had been contriving some plan to escape from her prison. But even if she were free, where could she go? Not back to the Strathroy mansion, for it was evident that Allyne Strathroy knew of her imprisonment, as her trunks containing her clothes had all been sent to her. It was plain, then, that her present abode was to be her home for some time.

Then she remembered her friend, Margaret Osmond; she could go to her if she could only escape from the asylum in which she was imprisoned. But that was easier to think of than to carry into execution.

Then a bright thought came into her mind. Margaret's brother, Leonard, was a lawyer. If she could only contrive in some way to let Margaret know where she was imprisoned, he would surely think of some way to free her.

So Blanche sat down and wrote a long letter. Writing materials had not been denied her. In her letter she gave a full description of all that had occurred.

Fortunately Blanche had remembered Margaret's address.

Then Blanche's next thought was, how could she send the letter?

She felt that it would be useless to attempt to bribe the woman that waited upon her.

While puzzling her brains over this difficult question, Blanche chanced to look out of the window. In the garden, at work, she saw a man, evidently a common day-laborer. He was an Irishman, so she judged from his looks.

"If I can only attract his attention, perhaps he will carry my letter," Blanche said, in joy.

The windows of her room were so arranged that they only opened a little way at the bottom; a space of some six inches. Evidently the design was to prevent the inmate of the room from attempting to escape that way.

Blanche wrote upon the letter: "Deliver this and keep the money. Don't show it to any one." Then she tied a five-dollar bill to the envelope and raised the window gently, without making any noise.

The man was busy at work, digging in the garden, and occasionally amusing himself with singing:

"An' she wor fair, wid coal-black hair,
That gurl of Mulla-na-green,"

came gently on the air to Blanche's ears as she opened the window.

Carefully she endeavored to attract the laborer's attention. At last she succeeded. The man paused in his work and looked at the window.

Blanche placed her fingers upon her lips, as if to entreat caution, then threw the letter carefully out of the window.

"Phat the divil's that now, anyway," muttered the workman, as he saw the letter float through the air to the earth. "It is a letther, an' the lady is afeard of bein' seen by some blaggard. Begorra, I'll see phat it is."

With his spade on his shoulder, carelessly, but still keeping a watchful eye around to see that he was not observed, the Irishman walked over and picked up the letter. Fortunately for Blanche's scheme he could read.

"'Deliver this an' kape the money!' Oh! I'll do that!" and he pocketed the five dollars instantly. "'Don't show it to any wan!' Of course I won't. I'd be a dirty blaggard for to do that, after takin' the money. I'll tend to it for yees, ma'am; more power to yees!" he added, nodding to Blanche in the window and putting the letter in his pocket.

Blanche could not hear his words, but she guessed the meaning of his speech.

"He will deliver it and I shall be rescued from this horrid place!" she cried in joy.

The man left off work at twelve, and faithful to his trust hurried down-town with the letter. He found the Osmonds at home and delivered the missive; at the same time telling the young man how the lady had dropped it to him from the window.

Margaret, on reading the letter, was astonished, and handed it immediately to her brother. He in turned perused it.

After a moment's thought, he put a few questions to the Irishman, regarding the exact situation of Doctor Fondell's house. The man, after expressing the wish that the young man shouldn't mention him in the matter, as he did not wish to get into trouble, told all he knew in regard to the matter; gave Leonard exact directions so as to reach the establishment of Doctor Fondell without difficulty, and then withdrew.

"What is to be done, Leonard?" exclaimed Margaret.

"Well, I don't exactly know," replied Leonard, with a puzzled air. "Blanche has been put in this lunatic asylum by her guardian, who, of course, has the same authority over her that a father would have. The idea is probably, as she says, to force her into marrying this Allyne Strathroy. It's a very difficult question to handle. I really have no right to interfere in the matter at all. This Chubbet is her legal guardian. Of course he has a right to select the residence of his ward; and though, by many, a private lunatic asylum would not be thought exactly the proper place to put a young lady like Miss Blanche, yet this old fellow, no doubt, would have some plausible reason for it. He might say that she was slightly ill, and that he thought she would receive better care at the asylum than at home. He might say a hundred things equally as reasonable and difficult to find a flaw in. If Blanche was of age now, I'd have her outside of that house inside of two hours, in spite of all the lawyers in New York."

"But, can't any thing be done?" asked Margaret, in despair.

"Not fairly," returned Leonard; "this man has the law on his side at present. If I can only think of some ruse now."

"Oh, do think of something!" cried Margaret.

"This case would bother a sharper head than mine," said Leonard, unable to seize upon a feasible idea.

"What is the use of being a lawyer, if you can't have any ideas?" said Margaret, illogically.

"My dear sister, the legal fraternity can't perform miracles any more than any other set of men," replied Leonard.

"Well, if I was a man, I'd go up there and take her out by force!" cried Margaret.

"Yes, and be lodged in the nearest station-house for my trouble, and all without getting Blanche out, either," said Leonard, dryly.

"But, can't you think of something?"

"Yes, by Jove, I can!" Leonard cried, suddenly.

"You have thought of something?" asked Margaret, gleefully. "What is it?"

"Restrain your curiosity, and answer a few questions," said Leonard, smiling at his sister's anxiety.

"How provoking you are, Leonard!" exclaimed Margaret, pouting.

"Never you mind that. Just let your mind go back to the time when you and Blanche were together."

"Well?"

"Has Blanche got any article of yours—a pair of gloves—scissors—knife, or any thing of that kind?"

"Oh, yes, quite a number—"

"That you gave her?"

"Yes."

"Well, that won't do," said the young man, thoughtfully. "I mean any thing—it matters not what it is, no matter how trifling—that you did not give her, and that she took without your saying either yes or no."

"No," replied Margaret, after thinking a moment. "Blanche and I generally exchanged with each other, so of course I gave her the articles."

"That blocks my game," said Leonard, in despair. "Just think again. There must be some little article that she has of yours, that she took without permission."

"No, not a single thing."

"Well, then, I guess Miss Blanche will have to stay where she is until I think of another plan," said Leonard, rather discontentedly.

"Oh!" cried Margaret, suddenly.

"Well?"

"I've thought of something!" exclaimed the girl, in delight.

"You have!" Leonard's spirits were rising.

"Yes; will a picture do?"

"What kind?"

"Only a *carte de visite*!"

"That will do!" cried Leonard, in triumph. "Describe the circumstances."

"It was our last day at school. The pictures were lying on the table. Blanche came in and said, 'I'm going to take one of these, Margaret.' I said, 'Don't, because they're all promised. I'll get you one in New York;' and then I thought she put it down on the table, but she didn't. She carried it off, and said afterward 'she thought it was real mean in me to make her steal it.'"

"Aha!" cried Leonard, in glee; "then she admitted the act. That's all I want. Get on your things. You must go with me to the police court."

"What for?" asked Margaret, in astonishment.

"Why, to swear to the facts that you have just related."

"Are you out of your senses?"

"Never you mind!" replied her brother, with an air of triumph. "Just get on your things. I've got a plan to get Blanche out of her prison. I'll explain as we go along."

So Margaret hurried to dress, and then when dressed, accompanied her brother to the nearest police justice.

About two o'clock on this same afternoon, Doctor Fondell was astonished by a violent knocking at the front gate.

Going in haste, he found a policeman and a young man in black standing there. A short distance off stood a hack.

"Are you Doctor Fondell?" said the policeman, referring to a paper in his hand, that was evidently legal in its nature.

"Yes," replied the doctor, somewhat astonished.

"I have here a warrant to search your house for one Blanche Maybury, accused of theft," said the officer.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

"WHAT?" cried the doctor, in astonishment.

"Didn't I speak plain enough?" asked the officer, tartly.

"I have here a warrant for the arrest of a woman called Blanche Maybury."

"Upon what charge?"

"Theft."

"Oh, this is some ridiculous blunder!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Well, you can settle that at the court," said the policeman.

"But, I tell you, this is a mistake!" persisted Fondell.

"Don't know nothing about it, except that I wants the young woman. I believe she is young, isn't she?" and the officer looked at Leonard, who was the young man in black that accompanied him.

"Yes," replied Leonard.

"And may I ask who you are, sir?" said the doctor, sharply turning upon the young lawyer.

"Oh, yes, you may ask," replied Leonard, blandly; "but as to my replying, that's quite another question."

The officer grinned. He enjoyed the retort.

"This is some absurd mistake!" cried Fondell, who couldn't understand it at all, except that if the officer per-

sisted in executing his duty, it would surely remove Miss Blanche Maybury from his care.

"As I said afore, that ain't got any thing to do with me," said the officer. "I hold a little bit of paper here, which calls for the arrest of Blanche Maybury. She's in your house, I believe, and I wants her. That's the long and short of it, cap."

Then it suddenly flashed into the doctor's head that this might be some plot, put into execution by some friend or lover of Blanche's to rescue her from his house; though he could not comprehend how any one could know that she was there, unless they got the information from Chubbet, who, of course, would not be likely to mention the fact, considering the necessity that there was for keeping the affair secret.

"There is no such person under my roof, sir," said the doctor, firmly. He had determined to put a bold face on and deny that Blanche was in his house, trusting that the officer was not fully confident of the fact, and that, by persisting in a bold denial, he would be able still to retain Blanche in his power.

"Not in your house, eh?" said the officer, with a quiet wink to Leonard.

"No, sir," replied the doctor, firmly.

"Well, then, we've make a mistake, of course, and all we've got for to do is to apologize and retire," said the officer, smilingly, and with a series of winks to Leonard.

"Yes, sir," exclaimed the doctor, loftily, and at the same time chuckling in his sleeve at the idea of getting rid of the officer so easily.

"Oh, gammon!" The peculiar tone in which the worthy member of the metropolitan police force uttered the simple sentence, opened Fondell's eyes instantly to the fact that he was not going to get rid of the agent of justice as easily as he had anticipated.

"Now, I'll just trouble you to produce this young woman and not keep me waiting any longer!" exclaimed the officer, in a tone that showed plainly that he was not to be trifled with.

"But, my dear sir," expostulated Fondell, in alarm. "I assure you that there is no such person as Miss Blanche Maybury in my house."

"Just you go and teach your grandmother to milk ducks," was the ambiguous response of the indefatigable officer.

The doctor understood plainly that his word was doubted.

"But I assure you upon my sacred honor," cried the doctor, laying his hand upon his breast in the locality where his heart was supposed to be.

"I don't believe you've got such a thing," said the officer, with a grin.

"The young lady is not here!"

"Oh, gammon!" The officer pronounced the expressive sentence still stronger on this occasion. "Just you produce the girl."

"How can I if she's not here?"

"Oh, that's too 'thin,' now," said the officer, in disgust.

"This gentleman evidently is not aware who is under his roof and who isn't," said Leonard, joining in the conversation. "To show you, sir," he continued, addressing the doctor, "how complete our information is, I will state that we not only know that this lady is in your house, but we can tell you the exact room that she occupies; that is, unless her apartment has been changed in the last two hours."

The doctor looked at the speaker in speechless amazement. This was a riddle for which he could find no explanation.

"You see, cap," said the officer, with a grin, "we know what's going on in your crib, better than you do yourself."

"We shall enter your front door, go up one flight of stairs, go along a hall, open the first door on the left that we come to, and in the room that door opens into we shall find the young lady that we are in search of."

The doctor stood like one thunderstruck. The young man had accurately described the route to the room wherein the doctor had confined Blanche.

This, of course, is easily explained, as Blanche, in her letter, had given full descriptions. But, as the doctor was totally ignorant of the fact that the captive had managed to write and send a letter, the knowledge that this strange young man had of the interior of his mansion and of the abode of the captive girl, appeared wonderful. He could not possibly account for it.

"Now, governor, don't keep us waiting, but hand the young woman over," said the officer.

"But I tell you she is not here!" cried the doctor, partly recovering from his astonishment and determined to resist to the last.

"Then we'll search your house and find out!" returned the policeman, firmly.

"You have no authority."

"Oh, ain't I?" cried the officer, in bitter sarcasm. "Just you chock your eyes over this warrant and see if I haven't authority." And the officer thrust the paper under Fondell's nose.

The doctor glanced at the paper. He saw that the officer was fully authorized, and that he would get himself into trouble if he attempted to offer resistance.

"I suppose that I shall have to comply," he said, in ill humor, "but I warn you, sir, that I shall hold you strictly accountable for this gross outrage upon my rights."

"Oh, you'll just raise a breeze now, you will," said the officer, in contempt.

On the way there in the hack, Leonard had informed the policeman of the character of Doctor Fondell and his Private Lunatic Asylum, and that worthy officer made "no bones"—as he would have expressed it—of telling the doctor exactly what he thought of him.

"Now just you show us into the house, and we don't want to have any more talk from you. I'm acting right in the line of my duty, and if you don't think so, just you go and make a complaint against me and you'll find out," said the officer, sternly.

So with an ill grace, Fondell ushered the unwelcome visitors into his mansion.

Thanks to the directions that Blanche had written, Leonard went straight to the room of the girl. The door was locked.

"There is no one in there, I assure you!" cried the doctor, making a final effort.

"Then, of course, you will have no objection to opening the door," said the officer, who felt that he had the best of it; "we'd like to look at the apartment. Who knows? One of us may come to board with you some time."

"You'd better not," replied the doctor, in a manner the reverse of amiable.

"Oh, I should make my will and buy my coffin afore I come," retorted the policeman. "But, just oblige me now by opening the door."

"The key is lost," cried the doctor, sullenly.

"Oh, is it?" and the tone of the metropolitan expressed doubt. "Then I hope you'll excuse me if I just kick it open, and forgive me if I break the lock," said the officer, sarcastically. And then he drew back from the door and raised his foot. The officer was a powerfully-built man, standing some six feet in height, and the doctor felt very little doubt that two or three kicks of his muscular leg would easily force the door open.

"Hold on—I've found the key!" the doctor cried.

"Well, I thought you would—in time," the officer said, with a knowing wink to Leonard. The policeman had an idea that his threat would produce the key.

Sullenly the doctor inserted the key in the lock—turned it, and the door flew open, disclosing Blanche.

"Well, she is here after all; ain't she?" cried the officer, in apparently great astonishment, addressing the doctor.

Fondell, choked back a curse in his throat and answered not.

"Miss Maybury, will you put on your hat and cloak and accompany this gentleman and myself to the police-station, please?" asked Leonard.

"Certainly!" cried Blanche, in joy; and it did not take her many seconds to get ready.

"I suppose I can accompany the young lady," said the doctor, with a sullen air.

"Well, I suppose you can, but I don't believe you can keep up with the hack," said the officer, with a grin.

"Can't I go in the hack?" said Doctor Fondell, in indignation.

"He pays for it," and the officer pointed to Leonard.

"I don't think that there will be room, sir," said Leonard, coolly. The party were now going down-stairs.

"This is an infamous proceeding!" cried Fondell, in a rage. "I understand it all, sir. This is some plot to take Miss Blanche from my charge!"

"Well, it does look like it—don't it?" said Leonard, coolly; "but if you examine into the affair, you'll find that I am acting *inside* the law."

"I repeat, sir, that this is an infamous transaction. I

shall hold both of you responsible for this scandalous outrage. This young lady has been placed in my charge by her guardian. I am responsible to him for her, and I demand to accompany her!" The doctor was greatly excited.

For a moment the officer was puzzled. But as he was acting strictly in the line of his duty, he knew that no blame could attach itself to him.

"Is this man your guardian, Miss?" he asked.

"No, sir," Blanche replied.

"Is he any relative of yours?"

"No, sir."

"Do you want him to go with you?"

"No, sir." Blanche's answer was decidedly firm.

"That settles it. You *can't* go," said the officer.

They had passed out into the garden by this time. A few seconds more brought them to where the hack was standing. Blanche, Leonard and the officer got into it and drove off, leaving the doctor almost speechless with rage.

Fondell rushed frantically into the house, seized his hat, and then started for the nearest line of street cars. He felt that the best thing for him to do, would be to warn lawyer Chubbet of what had occurred at once.

The hack drove at the topmost speed of the horses to the court where Leonard had procured the warrant to arrest Blanche for stealing the *carte de visite* belonging to Margaret.

The police justice was a strong personal friend of Leonard's, and had readily granted the warrant upon the circumstances being explained to him.

The officer produced his prisoner. His honor heard the case at once. Leonard, as attorney for the plaintiff, withdrew the charge, explaining that it was a mistake. His honor discharged the prisoner, and Blanche was free once more; thanks to the *ruse* of the young lawyer.

Leonard took Blanche home with him at once.

Margaret's joy at beholding her friend can hardly be described.

"Now, Miss Blanche," said Leonard, after his sister had finished kissing her, an operation which he would liked to have performed himself, "you are not in safety yet."

"No!" said Blanche, in alarm.

"No," replied Leonard; "they'll make the city too hot to hold you, as soon as Mr. Chubbet hears of this. You must go out of the United States."

"Out of the United States?" said Blanche, in wonder.

"Yes, over to Jersey—only a joke of mine—there you'll probably be safe. I've a friend over there that will be glad to receive you. Mrs. Fuller, Margaret."

"Oh, yes."

So over to Jersey City went Blanche, and found shelter with Leonard's friends.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TRAVELER'S REST.

LAWYER WEISEL sat in his dingy office, examining the papers relative to the Strathroy estate.

A smile was upon the face of the lawyer.

"I shall make that stake, sure," he muttered. "The only thing now is this witness of O'Kay's. If she's a good strong swearer, and can remember the facts that I want her to swear to, why, the whole chain of evidence will be complete. I'd be willing to go before any judge or jury in the land with it, and I'd win my case, sure. There's only one weak point, and that I know and no one else. And what's more, there ain't any one likely to even guess at it. I could win the whole estate for my Allyne Strathroy, but there's more money for me in a compromise, and that's what I'm working for."

Then the door of the office opened, and Billy O'Kay entered.

"How are you, Billy?" said Weisel; "you're the very man I wanted to see."

"I'm all here," Billy responded.

"Yes, I see. It's about that witness—the woman you spoke of. I'd like to see her. Who is she, and what is she like?"

"Well, I don't exactly know what her name is," Billy answered. "I never heard her called any thing but Irish Molly."

"That's a suggestive name," said Weisel.

"Yes," responded Billy. "She hangs out in a little

basement liquor-store in Baxter street, called the 'Traveler's Rest.'"

"That's another suggestive name, especially for that locality."

"Yes; well, she hangs out there. I'll take you right down there if you want to see her."

"Well, I do; about how old is she?"

"Somewhere round fifty, I should judge."

"Good strong swearer?"

"Oh, yes. She'll swear to any thing you like, and stick it to, too, under the hardest cross-examination, provided you pay her enough, and she's quite reasonable as to terms."

"That's good," said Weisel, approvingly.

"All you've got to do is to let her know what you want. She is a little stupid at getting hold of any thing, 'cos she's soaked in liquor 'bout all the time. But if she once gets it into her head, the devil himself can't drive it out."

"She'll be the very woman," said Weisel, with an air of triumph. "You see I want her to personate the wife of the English burglar, Jimmy Kand, alias Jimmy the Tiger, who had charge of the child in Sing Sing village, who carried it out West and then brought it to New York city, as I told you the other day, if you remember."

"Yes," said Billy.

"I've just made a memorandum of the history that she is to swear to."

"That's the ticket!" cried Billy. "Jist you read it over to her two or three times so as to git it into her head, an' she'll swear to it as nat'rally as if it all happened to her."

"Let's be going, then."

So Weisel and Billy started for the "Traveler's Rest."

Weisel found that it was a little basement liquor-saloon as Billy had said.

The two entered and inquired for Irish Molly.

"She's up-stairs in her room," said the woman behind the little bar. "Here, Patsy!" and she called to a tow-headed urchin, "show Mr. O'Kay"—Billy was well known in that region—"to Irish Molly's room."

The boy conducted the two to a terribly dirty little room on the second story.

Irish Molly sat on a low stool, smoking a short black pipe. The household articles in the room were few in number; consisting only of the stool upon which Molly sat, an old straw mattress spread upon the floor with a ragged blanket over it, a broken chair, a small bit of looking-glass, held by tacks to the wall, and a suspicious-looking black bottle.

Molly herself was a stout, gross-looking woman of fifty, with bloated features and coarse, yellowish-gray hair.

"Molly, I want to see you on business. I've got a job fur you," said Billy, as he entered the room.

"Talkin's dry work," said Molly, significantly, in a coarse voice, with just a touch of the "brogue" perceptible.

"That's so; yer head's level, I see, Molly. Patsy, bring us up a bottle of whisky—good, now, mind." Billy gave the boy the money and he speedily returned with a bottle and glasses.

Then Billy closed the door.

Molly gulped down a glass half-full of the raw whisky with great gusto.

"It warms me inside," she said, as she smacked her lips.

Weisel thought that he could drink almost any thing in the whisky line down to alcohol, but after taking a sip of the liquor furnished by the "Traveler's Rest," he concluded that it was too much, even for his throat, which was almost fire-proof.

"We want you as a witness, Molly; this gent will explain," Billy said.

"Go ahead," said the woman.

Weisel took out the memorandum he had made.

"It's to prove a child's identity," he said; "you're the woman that took care of the child."

"In course I kin swear to it," said Molly, taking another glass of whisky.

"Now, pay attention. Here's what you've got to swear to."

The woman nodded and took another glass of liquor.

"In the year 1848, you were living in the village of Sing Sing. Your husband—an English burglar—was serving out a term in Sing Sing prison. His name was Jimmy Kand, alias Jimmy the Tiger!"

"Why, how well you knows who I am, don't yer?" said the woman, with a grin, and then she took another swig at the whisky-bottle, disdaining the use of a glass this time.

Weisel saw that Molly understood him.

"While you were living in Sing Sing village, in the year 1848, one of the convicts in the prison made arrangements to board an infant with you. This was in February, 1848," continued the lawyer.

"I kin swear to it!" said Molly.

"You kept the infant with you in Sing Sing until the following November; then the child's father came to you, proved that he was the child's father by describing a certain peculiar mark or marks that the child had on its right arm, and he offered to pay you handsomely to take the child and go with him. He said his name was Smith—"

"More like if he had a-said his name was Brown," muttered the woman, again resorting to the whisky-bottle.

"No, no! Smith is better; it's more common, and he would be more apt to say that," said Weisel. "The burglar had forgot the name that Strathroy took, but he said that it was some common name and I thought Smith would be the best," he continued aside, to Billy.

"Oh, stick to Smith," Billy replied.

"He said his name was Smith."

"Just as you likes—Smith," grunted Molly.

"Yes, Smith. You consented and went with him to Cincinnati and lived in a small brick house on Plum street, between Fifth and Sixth—"

"Seventh and Eighth would be better," interrupted Molly, who evidently wanted to have a hand in forming the evidence that she was to swear to.

"No, no," said Weisel, impatiently; "you must swear to and tell it as I say. You see there is a woman somewhere who could swear to all this if I could find her, because it all happened."

"Why, in course it did! Can't I swear to it?" exclaimed Molly, again paying her respects to the whisky.

"Very well; but remember what I say," said Weisel.

"After you had been about three months in Cincinnati, your husband, whose term in prison had expired, came on to Cincinnati and persuaded you to rob this Mr. Smith—as you had discovered that he had considerable money—and take the child and go with him back to New York, which you did."

"Wouldn't it be better to say we killed the man?" Molly asked, with a grin; "it would be more nat'ral, you know, fur me and the Tiger fur to do."

"No, no, you'd get yourself in trouble!" cried Weisel.

"Just say that you robbed him in the night, and with the child and your husband, the 'Tiger,' came to New York."

"I kin swear to it," and Molly indulged in more whisky.

"You staid in New York, in a house on Baxter street—No. 40—till the child was about six years old; and by the way, when you got to New York, you discovered from the papers that you took from Mr. Smith that his real name was Clinton Strathroy, and that the child was his son, Allyne Strathroy, by a first wife."

"True as gospel," said Molly, with a knowing wink.

"Well, after staying in New York till the child was about six years old—that brings it to '53—your husband, the Tiger, deserted you for a younger and prettier woman, named Kate Harding."

"Yes, the villain he was to do it!" exclaimed Molly.

"Exactly—that's the ideal!" cried Weisel, in delight.

"You laid in wait for this woman one dark night and stabbed her with a carving-knife. Then, in order to get out of the way of the police, you went to Boston, staid there some years, then finally came back to New York under an assumed name."

"Right you are, my chicken!" exclaimed Molly. The whisky was evidently beginning to take effect upon her.

"Of course, when you went to Boston, you lost sight of this child, but you could easily identify it again by a peculiar mark, or marks, upon the right arm. Three moles, about an inch apart, in the shape of a triangle. Do you know what a triangle is?"

"In course I does," said Molly, in drunken indignation.

"Look here." Then wetting her fingers in the whisky she drew the three moles, forming a triangle, on the palm of her hand correctly.

"That's it!" cried Weisel.

"Of course. I kin swear to the three moles on the babby's right arm. Just here, eh?" And Molly laid her hand upon the upper part of her arm, near the elbow.

"Yes, yes! that's the very place!"

"I kin swear to it!" And Molly refreshed herself once more with the whisky.

"But, hold on! you're not to swear to the moles," said Weisel, quickly.

"No moles?" said Molly, in wonder.

"No; because when the child was about five years old, it pulled a pan of boiling water over and scalded the flesh on the arm where the moles were, and destroyed them. You must swear to the scalding; that's the strong point. You recognize the child—now a man—by the scar on the arm where the moles were."

"He pulled a pan of boiling water onto him and scalded the moles off," repeated Molly, evidently bothered. "Well, I kin swear to that, too, if you say so."

"And that's all."

"That's easy 'nuff," said Molly, with drunken gravity. "Jist hear me." And then, in a sing-song voice, the woman commenced, rocking herself to and fro on the stool: "I lived in Sing Sing in '49; my husband Jimmy Kand, the Tiger, was in 'quod.' A cove in 'quod,' too, sent me a kid to take care on. The kid's father comes an' pays me for to steal the kid. He says his name is Brown—"

"No, no!" interrupted Weisel. "Smith!"

"Brown is better," said the woman, doggedly.

"No, no; Smith!" repeated the lawyer.

"Have yer own way," said Molly, sullenly. "Smith, then. He said his name was Smith. I goes with him, and takes the babby to Cincinnati, and we lives in a house on Plum, between Seventh and Eighth streets—"

"No, no!" again interrupted Weisel; "between Fifth and Sixth."

"T'other's better," said Molly, obstinately.

"No, no! it must be as I say!"

"All right—between Fifth and Sixth. Then my husband comes. We go for the man— No, for the money— an' don't say nothin' 'bout the man. Then we comes to New York. We looks over the papers an' find the cove's name is Clinton Strathroy, an' the little kid wot I's got is Allyne Strathroy, a son by a first wife. My old man goes after another woman. I go fur her with a carving-knife, an' maybe I didn't slice her—"

"Don't dwell on that!" cried Weisel, "it's natural, I know, an' you do it very well, indeed, but it isn't to the point."

"Then I goes to Boston. Arterward comes to New York, an' recognizes the kid by three moles in a triangle on his arm."

"No, no!" cried Weisel, in despair. "If you say that, you'll upset the whole thing. You recognize the child by the scald on the arm, where the moles have been."

"Oh, I forgot the boiling water," said Molly. "Hear me ag'in."

Then she rehearsed the story again. She got the story right exactly, excepting that she would say Brown instead of Smith, and Seventh and Eighth streets instead of Fifth and Sixth. And as these really made no difference, Weisel told her to have her own way in the matter and say it as she liked, much to Molly's satisfaction. She was strangely obstinate on the point.

So the lawyer left the woman perfectly satisfied.

"It is a most astonishing thing how she could get the story so quickly," Weisel said, after they had got into the street. "She seemed to know it by heart after once hearing it. She must have an astonishing memory. I defy any cross-examination to shake her testimony. It's funny, though, that she would stick to Brown and to the other streets, but it doesn't matter. Billy, we'll make our stake, sure!"

But this world is very uncertain.

CHAPTER XXX.

EXPLODING THE MINE.

LAWYER CHUBBET and Allyne Strathroy sat together in the library of the latter.

Chubbet had been informed of Blanche's escape from the house of Fondell and had lost no time in setting the detectives upon the track of the girl. He had put the case in the hands of a prominent detective firm on Broadway, and instructed them to spare no expense in the effort to hunt down and recapture the fugitive.

So, even then, the human bloodhounds of the lawyer were leaving no stone unturned to discover where Blanche had taken refuge.

The old lawyer had sought Strathroy for two purposes. First, to tell him of Blanche's flight and of the means he had taken to discover and recapture her. Second, to inform him of the existence of a *second* Allyne Strathroy, and of the claim that the second Allyne had put forward respecting the Strathroy estate.

Allyne heard the lawyer's story through without comment.

"It's a very ugly affair," said Chubbet, after he had finished.

"You think, then, that this man—my half-brother—can claim the whole estate?" asked Allyne, thoughtfully.

"Beyond a doubt, if he can establish the marriage of his mother with your father, and prove his own identity. And from the papers his lawyer has allowed me to see, there can be but little doubt that he will succeed in doing it."

"And yet he offers to compromise for fifty thousand dollars?"

"Yes, and my dear Mr. Allyne, I believe that I am advising you for your own good when I say that you ought to accept it," said Chubbet, with dignity.

"But, if they are so sure of their case, why should they want to compromise?" asked Allyne.

"To avoid the lawsuit, which will be long and expensive," replied the lawyer. "I must say, that they have acted in a very straightforward and honorable manner in the affair. Their claim is strong beyond a doubt; but, don't take my word for it. Examine with your own eyes. They offer fairly. They will let you examine both the papers and the witnesses; put any questions you like to them. They feel so sure that you yourself will see the justice of their claim, under your father's will, that you will not hesitate for a moment in compromising the affair."

"It does look as if they felt certain of winning."

"Of course it does!" cried Chubbet. "As I have said, they have acted very honorably in the matter. Why, if they had chosen, the first notification of the affair that we would have received, would have been a summons to appear and 'show cause,' etc."

"That is very true," said Allyne, thoughtfully, and with a gloomy brow. The blows were coming thick and fast upon him.

"Of course it is true, my dear boy. For your own sake, I advise a compromise. If you insist upon carrying the matter into the courts, and they should triumph, you would lose every thing. Therefore, compromise while you can. I am acting for your interest in giving this advice."

"I will examine into the affair. Is there a weak spot in the chain of evidence that they offer?"

"Well," said Chubbet, thoughtfully, "the question of this Allyne's identity is the point. The marriage of his mother they can prove. There isn't a doubt. I have examined the papers and they can not be questioned. But the identity of the young man—only a year older than yourself—unless they can prove beyond a doubt that he is Allyne Strathroy, son of your father, Clinton Strathroy, and Lizzie, his first wife, whose maiden name was Duke, their whole case falls to the ground. But, if they can prove it, his claim to the estate, under your father's will, can not be disputed."

"How do they intend to prove this man's identity?" Allyne asked.

"By the woman who had charge of him while a baby. He has some peculiar mark on his body, too, that will in a measure serve to identify him," replied Chubbet.

"Then the whole case will rest on this woman's evidence?"

"Yes."

"I must see her, then," said Allyne, firmly.

"They are perfectly willing."

"They must be sure, then, that her evidence will prove what they want," said Strathroy, in a tone of conviction.

"Yes; it looks like it, certainly."

"I will see the woman, but I must see her alone. I think that I am acute enough to detect whether she is telling the truth, or only a story that she has been paid to swear to."

"I will tell Mr. Weisel—he is the lawyer on the other side, a sharp fellow—and ask him to bring or send the woman up here this evening."

"Very well; that will do," Allyne replied.

"I trust I will have Miss Blanche in my hands soon. She can not escape the search long," Chubbet said, as he departed.

Allyne's brow was sad and gloomy; and no wonder, for

over his heart, like a grim shadow, lay the remembrance of a scarlet crime.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TRAPPING THE BIRD.

CHUBBET, after leaving the house of Strathroy, proceeded at once to his office by means of an omnibus.

The lawyer had not been in the office five minutes, when one of the detective firm, whom he had employed to search for Blanche, entered.

"Any news?" asked Chubbet, anxiously.

"Yes; we have found out where she is."

"Ah, indeed?" exclaimed Chubbet, in joy.

"Yes; a lucky accident put us right on the scent. The young lady is over in Jersey City. The policeman on duty at the ferry used to be up-town. Fifth avenue, from Twentieth to Thirtieth street, was in his beat, and he knew Miss Maybury by sight very well. Well, when I inquired if he had seen any thing of her crossing the ferry—because I had a suspicion that she would try to get out of the city—he said yes. That she had crossed the ferry with another lady and gentleman. Then on the other side I found the hackman that had taken the three in his coach. Of course, it was all plain sailing after that. I found the house easy enough. Now you can put your hands on the young lady whenever you like," said the detective.

"I'll go over at once!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"But won't you want any legal papers to get her?"

"Oh, bless you, no!" cried Chubbet. "It's all a mistake. I can explain matters, so that she will have no objection to return. I don't wish to use any compulsion in the matter, whatever."

So Chubbet and the detective hurried over to Jersey City.

Reaching the house wherein Blanche had taken refuge, the lawyer rung the bell.

The door was opened by the lady of the house, Mrs. Fuller, in person.

"I wish to see Miss Blanche Maybury, please," said the lawyer, blandly.

Mrs. Fuller was about to deny that Blanche was in her house, acting in obedience to orders given her by Leonard, but the lawyer, who anticipated what she was about to say, continued:

"I am Mr. Chubbet, madam, guardian to Miss Maybury. I know that the young lady is in your house, and I wish to speak with her. If you will oblige me by going and informing Miss Maybury that I am here, I am sure that she will not refuse to see me. I might demand this as a right, madam, as you must be well aware, as I am her legal guardian and have a detective officer here to enforce my rights. But I am sure Miss Blanche will not refuse to see me. It is a dreadful mistake from beginning to end, and I trust that the young lady will not refuse to listen to my explanation."

The manner of the old lawyer—his bland politeness, and the absence of every thing that looked like a threat—had great weight with the old lady with whom Blanche had taken refuge.

"Well, I will see, sir," she said; "step into the parlor, please."

The lawyer and detective entered the little parlor and sat down, while Mrs. Fuller went up-stairs with the message to Blanche.

In a few minutes the old lady returned and informed the lawyer that Blanche would see him.

Bidding the detective wait, Chubbet followed Mrs. Fuller out of the parlor.

"You will find the young lady in the back room at the head of the stairs," she said.

Chubbet bowed and ascended the stairs.

In a plainly-furnished room, the lawyer found Blanche.

"My dear Miss Blanche, I am extremely glad that you are willing to give me a chance to explain this terrible mistake," said Chubbet, in his blandest tone, taking a seat at the same time by the girl.

"Mr. Chubbet, is there any explanation possible, of the way in which I have been treated? Deprived of my liberty, accused of being mad and shut up in a lunatic asylum. Can you explain it?" demanded Blanche, indignantly.

"Yes, my dear child, I can," said Chubbet, in a tone of voice that expressed deep emotion. "I have been deceived, my dear child, as well as you. It is all a terrible mistake.

When I left you in the sitting-room in the doctor's house, I went down-stairs and there I found Mr. Strathroy. He had his carriage outside and said that he would like to take you home if I had no objection. I thought that perhaps his society would be more agreeable than mine, and besides, I did not know very well how to refuse him. So I consented; got into my carriage and drove off. I hadn't the remotest idea but that you would reach home safely. You can judge of my astonishment, then, my dear child, when I called at the Strathroy mansion yesterday, and Mr. Allyne informed me that he thought your mind was affected and that he had left you at the doctor's house for treatment. I rushed up-town instantly; arrived at the doctor's house just about an hour after you had gone. Of course I was rejoiced at hearing of your release. I set the detectives at work instantly to find out whither you had fled; not for the purpose, my dear child, of carrying you back to that dreadful institution, but to offer you a home in my own house, for, my dear Miss Blanche, I am the same to you as a father, now. I should have taken you to my own house long ago, but you were happy and contented as the guest of Miss Jennie Strathroy."

The explanation of the lawyer seemed reasonable to Blanche. She had never experienced the slightest unkindness at his hands. Indeed, he had always treated her with a father's kindness.

Blanche, too, being fully aware of the desperate passion that filled the breast of Allyne Strathroy, did not wonder at the scheme by which he had sought to restrain her liberty.

"Mr. Chubbet, I want to believe you innocent of this cruel attempt. I *do believe* that you are innocent," she said, hastily.

"Then, my dear child, show that belief by accepting the shelter of my roof. It cuts me to the heart, when I think of you being under the protection of strangers," said Chubbet, in a mournful voice, and wiping an imaginary tear from his right eye.

"I suppose that you will have no objections to my friends calling upon me?" said Blanche.

"My dear, what do you take me for? Do you suppose, even for one single instant, that in inviting you to my house, I am inviting you to a prison? Of course not, my dear child. Have all the friends you like. You will be the mistress of the house. You shall not be commanded by any one, my dear, under my roof."

"Then I will write a line to some friends to let them know where they can find me."

"Certainly, my dear; I will wait," said Chubbet.

Blanche ran to her room, penned a few hasty lines to Margaret, telling her that her guardian had explained his ignorance of the wrong that had been done her, and that she had gone to his house. Then she gave the address, and begged Margaret to call upon her at once.

The letter finished, she placed it in an envelop, sealed it up, and gave it to Mrs. Fuller to post.

Then, getting her hat and cloak, she told the lawyer that she was ready to accompany him.

So, Blanche, the lawyer and the detective, all returned to New York together.

After crossing the ferry, the lawyer and Blanche got into a coach and proceeded to the residence of the lawyer.

On the way there, Chubbet spoke of Allyne Strathroy, and told Blanche that he intended to insist upon his tendering an apology for his conduct.

"No, no!" Blanche said, hastily; "do not speak of the matter at all. I forgive him, freely. I have caused him pain enough now, though, heaven knows, it is not my fault. Let it all be forgotten."

"Just as you please, my dear," answered Chubbet.

After leaving Blanche at his own house, in Madison avenue, the lawyer went at once to Allyne's abode.

"Aha!" he cried, in glee, as he entered the library, where Allyne sat, busy with gloomy thoughts. "I have secured the bird all right. She's at my house."

"I am glad of that," Allyne said, "but I am afraid that we will never be able to win her consent to marrying me."

"My dear boy," said the lawyer, "then we must do without it." Chubbet's face had a look full of meaning.

"I do not exactly understand you," said Allyne; but he had a pretty clear idea, though, of what the old lawyer meant.

"My dear Mr. Allyne, you want the girl; I want a certain sum of money—as per contract between us—when you marry

Miss Blanche. Now, I do not think that we should allow ourselves to be defeated in our wishes, simply because a foolish child chooses to say no, when she ought to say yes."

"My own idea," said Allyne.

"Exactly. Now Miss Blanche is in my house. I would have preferred that this should have taken place elsewhere, this affair that I'm about to speak of; but, since it can't be helped, why I'll allow my house to be used. I know a certain minister—he is without a pulpit just now on account of certain little irregularities—who, for a handsome fee, will marry you to Miss Blanche, even if the lady does not say yes."

"But, suppose she says no?"

"I intend to arrange it so that she won't say any thing," said Chubbet, quietly. "There are certain drugs known to science that come under the head of soporifics. I will see that Miss Blanche partakes of one of these potent drugs in her food or wine. When she is drugged, the minister being ready, the marriage takes place, and once it is consummated I should like to know how on earth she is going to help herself?"

"She will hate me when she awakes to the knowledge of the truth," said Allyne, thoughtfully.

"That's nothing unusual in a wife," replied Chubbet. "They generally hate their husbands. But, you'll have the proud consciousness of knowing that you've done something to deserve it."

"I'll do it!" cried Allyne. "I have determined that the girl shall be mine, and she shall be, though I sink my soul to the depths of the uttermost perdition to obtain her."

The lawyer, despite himself, shivered at the fierce tone of the young man.

"The affair had better take place to-morrow evening," said Chubbet.

"Very well."

"I will make all the arrangements."

And the interview ended.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CROSS-EXAMINATION.

ABOUT eight in the evening, the servant brought Allyne word that two persons, who said they came by appointment, were at the door.

"Show them into the parlor," said Strathroy.

So the two, who were Lawyer Weisel and Irish Molly, were shown into the parlor.

"Now comes the trial," said Weisel, to himself, as they entered the parlor. "If she will only stick to her story, he'll knuckle, sure, and I'll be able to make my little stake."

"Ain't this high!" said Molly, surveying her figure in the full-length mirror.

"Now, you know what you've got to say?" whispered the lawyer to her.

"I kin swear to it, but the b'ilin' water troubles me, but I kin remember that, too," answered Molly, with a grin.

"Don't forget that," whispered Weisel; "that's the main point."

Then Allyne's entrance cut short the lawyer's warning.

"Mr. Strathroy, I presume," said the lawyer, with a bow.

"Yes, sir."

"Allow me to introduce myself. J. Weisel, sir, an humble member of the legal fraternity. I received a note from brother Chubbet this afternoon, stating that you would like to examine the witness by whose evidence we expect to prove the identity of Allyne Strathroy, son of Clinton Strathroy, and Lizzie, his wife."

"Such is my wish, sir."

"This is the witness. We, on the other side, are willing to give you every chance to investigate the justice of our claims," said Weisel.

"Yes, I'm the witness wot had care on the babby," said Molly.

A puzzled look appeared upon Allyne's face when he heard the woman's voice.

"What is the name of the witness?" he asked.

"Mary Kand," answered the lawyer.

"Ah!" The simple exclamation alone came from Allyne's lips.

"You can have an interview with her alone, sir," said Weisel. "We desire that you shall be fully satisfied."

"Thank you. I should like to ask her a few questions, if you have no objections," Allyne said.

"None in the world," Weisel answered.

Allyne touched the bell upon the table. The servant answered it.

"Show this gentleman into the library. You will wait there, please."

"Yes, sir. Don't hurry yourself. Subject her to a rigid cross-examination; our case will stand it." Then Weisel followed the servant out of the room.

Allyne closed the door.

"Now sit down, please," he said, gently, "and tell me all you know about this affair."

Molly sat down.

"Ain't you a-goin' to ax me questions like the lawyers do?" she asked.

"Not yet," Allyne replied. "Tell your story—tell all you know. After you get through I may ask you some questions."

"All right," and then the woman began. "In the year 1848 I was a-living in Sing Sing; my name is Mary Kand, and my husband was named Jimmy Kand, alias Jimmy the Tiger."

A strange expression came over Allyne's face as he heard the name.

"He was in prison then. A feller who was in prison, too, sends me a babby to take care on. 'Bout eight months after that, a gent comes as says his name is Brown, an' that he's the kid's father. He offered to pay me well if I'd take the babby an' go out West with him; so I goes. We goes to Cincinnati an' lives on Plum, between Fifth and Sixth streets. Then my husband comes out of prison an' comes on to Cincinnati. I finds out that this Mr. Brown has a lot of money. So my husband an' I steals his money an' papers an' comes to New York, bringin' the babby with us. From the papers we finds out that the gent's name is Clinton Strathroy, an' the babby is his son, Allyne, the child of his first wife, Lizzie. I staid in New York till the kid was 'bout six years old; then my husband went after another woman, an' I cut her with a carving-knife one night, an' run away to Boston for fear of the perlice. I staid in Boston, some time, then come back to New York an' took another name."

"You left the child when you went to Boston?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen it since?"

"Yes; t'other day."

A puzzled expression appeared upon Allyne's face at the woman's words.

"Where did you see him?"

"In the lawyer's office."

"The child is a man, now?"

"Yes."

"How, then, did you recognize him?"

"By a mark on the right arm, here," said the woman, indicating the spot.

"Ah! and that was what?" It was plainly evident that Allyne's interest was intense. Big drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead and the veins were swollen out like whipcords.

"The babby had on its arm three moles, forming a triangle—an'—one day it pulled a pan of boiling water over on it and scalded the moles off, an' I know the man to be the babby that I took care on by the scar on the arm where the three moles were." Molly drew a long breath, evidently of relief, when she had finished.

"Woman, you are lying!" cried Allyne, in strong agitation.

"I kin swear to it!" exclaimed Molly, defiantly.

"Swear to what? Swear to all of it?"

"Yes," answered Molly, stubbornly.

"Then you will swear to a lie!" Allyne exclaimed.

"True as gospel!" cried Molly. "I wish I may die if it isn't."

"Yes, all truth except one thing, and that thing is a lie!"

"Which one?" asked Molly, astonished.

"To the scar on the arm of the man. The child that you left when you went to Boston had three moles forming a triangle on its arm, but no scar."

"Well, I'm blest!" growled Molly, in an undertone.

"The child never pulled a pan of boiling water over on it. If that child is alive to-day—a man—he has the three moles on his arm."

Molly looked thunderstruck but said not a word.

"I guess this scheme, now," said Allyne, a touch of triumph in his voice. "This lawyer, by some strange combination of circumstances, became possessed of the history of this child. He saw that he could seize upon the estate to which this child is heir, if he could find the child, now a man. He could not find the heir, but he found some obscure fellow with the scar of a scald on his arm in the same spot that the three moles were on the arm of the heir. Then he found you and persuaded you to swear to this story of the scalding in addition to what you really did know about the child, so that he could bring forward the fellow with the scarred arm and prove him, by your evidence, to be the child that you had once nursed. Is it not so? Deception is useless. You see I know the truth."

"Right you are, governor, an' no lie in it," said Molly, impulsively. "Bless yer, this lawyer never thought as how I was Mary Kand, when he come for me to swear to the story of my own life. And he got it wrong twice; 'cos he said Smith instead of Brown, and Plum, between Fifth and Sixth, when it was atween Seventh and Eighth. I know'd, too, that the b'ilin' water part would upset the whole thing."

"You confess, then, the truth?"

"I might's well; you knows all about it. There never was no scar on the babby's arm, an' he never got scalded by no b'ilin' water; an' if that babby's a man to-day, he's got three moles on his arm an' they make a triangle. An' if I could see his arm an' see the three moles, I'd swear he was the babby that I took care of, till I was black in the face."

"But the rest is all true, though?"

"Every word."

"So, then," muttered Allyne, to himself, "the estates belong to the first Allyne after all?"

"But I say, governor!" said Molly, suddenly, "how did you know that the b'ilin' water an' the scar on the babby's arm was a lie, when all the rest was gospel truth?"

"Guessed it," said Allyne, with a strange expression upon his face—the same expression that had been called there when the name of the burglar, Jimmy the Tiger, fell upon his ears.

"I know'd I couldn't tell that b'ilin' part straight, an' he wanted to make me say Smith, too," muttered Molly.

"Did this man with the scar on the arm look any thing like the child that you took care of?" Allyne asked.

"Not a bit!" replied Molly, contemptuously; "he was an ugly ragamuffin, while my little kid was as sharp an' as handsome as a needle."

"Yet you would have sworn that he was the same?"

"Well, governor, you must live, you know," replied Molly, with a grin.

"Here's twenty dollars for you," said Allyne, and he took four five-dollar bills from his wallet and gave them to the woman. "When these are gone, come to me and you shall have more."

Molly took the money in astonishment.

"Say nothing to the lawyer. If he asks you any questions, tell him that I was satisfied." Then Allyne rung for Williams to bring the lawyer down.

To the lawyer he said but a few words.

"I am quite satisfied. Mr. Chubbet will see you in a few days and arrange matters."

Molly and Weisel departed, the former in astonishment, the latter in joy.

"If the blows come too thick, I have one refuge left," Allyne muttered. "I have played the lion; the skin of the fox may serve my turn next."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WEAVING THE WEB.

DOCTOR JOHN MACDONALD was an aged gentleman of seventy. The snows of many winters had whitened his locks to the color of the driven snow. Yet still he was an extremely well-preserved old gentleman, with a mind as vigorous and as clear as in the days long gone by, when he had attended faithfully to one of the largest practices ever possessed by any physician in New York city; and his practice was also one of the most lucrative in the city.

Doctor Macdonald had retired some years before the time of which we write, on an ample fortune, accumulated solely by his own personal exertions.

The doctor lived in a handsome brown-stone front on Twenty-third street.

One morning, just after breakfast, the doctor sat in his study enjoying his morning paper, when a servant entered with a message that a gentleman—by name, Eben Benson—desired to see the doctor in person on particular business.

"Show him in, John," said the doctor.

The servant, in a few minutes, introduced into the doctor's study, a gentleman in a rather rusty black suit. He had great gray-black eyes and sandy-colored hair, cropped rather short.

"Doctor Macdonald?" said the stranger, after the servant had withdrawn.

"Yes," said that gentleman.

"My name is Eben Benson. I am a literary man by profession. I am in search of some information that I think you can give me, sir."

"I shall be delighted, sir, if it is in my power," said the doctor, who, having been informed that his visitor was a literary man, did not wonder at his seedy suit of black.

"You were, I believe, the family physician of Mr. Clinton Strathroy, of No. 268 Fifth avenue, when he was in the flesh?"

"Yes, sir, I was," said the doctor, wondering what this had to do with any information that he could possibly give his strange visitor.

"Do you remember the birth of his child, Allyne, some twenty-four or five years ago, or thereabouts?"

"Yes, sir, I was present on that occasion. I attended Mrs. Strathroy."

"So I understood, sir," said Mr. Benson. "Now, sir, I am about to come to the purpose of my visit. Was there any peculiar mark, or marks of any kind, on the infant, at its birth, by which it could be identified in after life, supposing it to have been lost?"

"No, sir, none that I am aware of," said the doctor, after thinking for a moment.

Mr. Benson seemed disappointed.

"No mark or marks, whatever?"

"No, sir."

"Then if the child *had* been lost when an infant, it could not have been identified except by its appearance, and if years had passed, and the face had changed, it could not have been identified at all?"

"No, sir," replied the doctor; "but will you allow me to ask, sir, why you wish this information? The object thereby to be gained?"

"I have had a dream, sir, three times in succession—and I believe in dreams. This dream was relative to a certain mark on the person of Allyne Strathroy. But if there isn't any particular mark upon the gentleman's body, of course the dream is a delusion and a snare."

The doctor examined his visitor closely, but saw nothing in his appearance to indicate a lack of sense, strange as his speech was.

"Well, I am really sorry, sir, that the gentleman hasn't some peculiar mark upon his person," said the doctor, willing to humor his visitor.

"It is a pity, sir," said the strange Mr. Benson, gravely.

"By the way," said the doctor, as a sudden thought occurred to him, "wouldn't a personal blemish that had come upon him since his birth answer your purpose?"

A gleam of fire shot from the eyes of the stranger; it was but an instant, then it was gone.

"I don't know, sir," he answered, soberly; "what is the nature of this blemish?"

"It's a bad scar on the great toe of the left foot. Young Allyne went, when he was about ten years old, swimming one day in the river, and on the shore stepped upon a piece of a bottle, which cut his toe to the bone, like a knife. It left a very ugly scar."

"On the large toe of the left foot—a scar," said Mr. Benson, as he noted it down in his memorandum book, and the doctor saw that his hand trembled excessively.

"Yes, sir," said the doctor.

"I am very much obliged to you," said the stranger, preparing to retire.

"Oh, not at all," replied the doctor. "I am sorry that it was not in my power to satisfy you in the other particular."

"I'll try and make this do, sir," said the stranger, bowing himself out of the room.

"A harmless lunatic," said the doctor, laughing.

But, like Hamlet, there was method in the madness of Mr. Eben Benson.

In a little upper room on Nassau street sat an engraver at work.

A rap on the door caused him to pause, lift up his head and bid the rapper enter. And while the person who had rapped is entering, we will take a look at the engraver. He is a young man, not yet thirty, and his features have a decided German cast. He has a high, white forehead; very prominent, overhanging eyebrows; full blue eyes, and long golden hair pushed carelessly back behind his ears, which gives him a singular appearance. The engraver is a "dreamer," as the world calls those who think of something besides the necessities of life. It is plainly evident in his face. He is a student in abstract studies. Had he lived in olden times, he would have been a seeker for the philosopher's stone, and probably would have finished his career at the stake as a sorcerer, but as he lives in a modern age, he is an "expert;" in what particular science we will soon see.

The visitor that entered the engraver's room, was a gentleman with long, black hair, clubbed in a Southern style, and gray-black eyes.

"Are you Mr. Hendrich?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied the engraver.

"You are an expert, I believe, in regard to handwriting. If I mistake not, you were the witness in the Towland will case who was called upon to decide whether the signature attached to the will was genuine or not?"

"I was, sir," replied the engraver.

This was the art, that he was an "expert" in. He had a marvelous instinct—it seemed to be that, for he himself sometimes could not explain the process by means of which he decided that one signature was forged, and another a genuine one.

"I have a curiosity to test your skill, sir. I have two signatures which I wish you would look at, and give your opinion regarding them," said the stranger.

Then, from his memorandum-book he produced two slips of paper. Each slip of paper had a signature upon it.

The engraver took them in his hand and examined them carefully. Then he took a magnifying glass from his workbench, and with it closely scrutinized the slips of paper.

"Well, sir, what do you think?" asked the stranger.

"One of these signatures is a genuine one—the other is an imitation of it, but extremely well done," replied the engraver.

"Which is the genuine?"

"This one," and the engraver pointed to one of the slips of paper which seemed much older than the other.

"You feel sure of this?"

"Yes, sir," replied the expert, firmly; and then he continued: "If you will take the glass, I think I can point out to you a very perceptible difference in the signatures."

The stranger took the glass and adjusted it to his eye.

"If you will look at the tail of the y in this signature, you will notice that it has a broad, careless sweep; the writer is used to writing it and makes the sweep without thought. In the other—the forged signature—the sweep is labored—it is an imitation—quite a close one, too; but it lacks the careless freedom of the other."

Now that the expert pointed it out, the stranger saw the difference, slight as it was, although he had examined the signatures closely and had not been able to detect any difference in them, except that one bore the marks of age and the other was freshly written.

"Yes, I see," said the stranger.

"There are some other things of the same nature perceptible to my eyes in the two signatures, but not near as plain as the one I have called your attention to."

"You seem quite certain about it?"

"Oh, I am."

"I don't doubt that you would be willing to swear that one of these signatures is a forgery of the other, even in a court of justice," said the stranger, in a jocular manner.

"I shouldn't have the slightest hesitation," returned the expert. "But, by the way, I am a little curious on one point. I have given you some information, now can you oblige me with some?"

"Certainly."

"Ain't these signatures written by two brothers? one attempting to imitate the hand of the other?"

"No; not to my knowledge."

"That is strange," said the expert, with a puzzled air. "I have a theory that there is a family resemblance in the handwriting of relatives. I never have been mistaken yet;

but if the two men that wrote these signatures are not related by blood, then I'm afraid that there's something wrong about my theory."

"They are not, sir, I am sure," said the stranger. "How much, sir?"

"For what?"

"For this information."

"Oh, nothing, sir."

"I am very much obliged."

"Not at all."

Then the stranger went straight before a police justice and swore out a warrant.

The charge was the Scarlet Crime.

Murder.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CUP AT THE LIP.

It was the evening of the very same day that the mysterious stranger had the interview with the expert, who told forged signatures from genuine ones, that Allyne Strathroy and the lawyer Chubbet sat together in the mansion of the latter.

"Well, is it all arranged?" asked Allyne, who was in full evening dress, as was also the lawyer, as though they were about to attend a party or a ball.

"Yes, every thing is prepared. I got Blanche to drink a glass of drugged wine, about fifteen minutes ago; it will throw her into a stupor for about four hours. My housekeeper is now dressing her for the ceremony. You see Blanche is unconscious of what is going on around her, although, with assistance, she can stand up."

"But can you trust your housekeeper?" asked Allyne.

"Oh, yes; she's a sensible woman, and won't tell tales out of school," replied Chubbet. "I expect the minister every moment. The housekeeper and I will act as witnesses. It won't take but a moment. And before Miss Blanche wakes to consciousness again, she will be wholly yours."

"It can not fail," said Allyne, a gleam of triumph upon his face.

A ring at the door bell and the servant announced the minister.

The lawyer greeted the gentleman, who was a most decided "black sheep," if ever there was one that wore the pastor's holy garb.

"We are waiting for you," said Chubbet, shaking hands with the reverend gentleman, who had a decidedly unreverend face. "Dr. Pike, Mr. Strathroy, the bridegroom," said Chubbet, introducing "By the way, doctor, as my ward is quite unwell, the ceremony will be strictly private."

"I am ready, Mr. Chubbet, whenever you are," said the doctor.

"I'll see if my ward is ready," and the lawyer hastened up-stairs.

Blanche, dressed in white silk, her face paler far than her bridal robes, lay on the sofa, unconscious of all that was passing around her. The potent drug that she had swallowed had deadened all her senses.

"Is she all ready, Mrs. Grange?" the lawyer asked, of the housekeeper.

"Yes, sir; all ready," replied the housekeeper, who was an elderly, heavy-built woman, with a stolid face.

"Let us get her up into a chair; it will look better," said Chubbet, who had a great regard for looks, even though he knew that every spectator that was to witness the scene to come, understood the nature of Blanche's sickness.

So the lawyer and the housekeeper raised the senseless girl, and placed her in an easy chair, the cushioned back of which supported the beautiful head of the helpless girl who was about to be sacrificed on the altar of passion, with the god Mammon as high priest.

Not a single particle of pity entered the heart of the old lawyer, not even when he held the lithe form of the young girl in his arms, and felt the dull beating of her heart.

"There, that will look better," said Chubbet, surveying the young girl.

"She looks all right, sir; a little pale," replied the housekeeper.

"Yes, but we can't help that," he said.

"Well, it doesn't make any difference," observed the housekeeper.

"Not a bit," said the lawyer. "By the way, you had better stand by her, and keep your eyes upon her; she might fall out of the chair."

"Yes, sir, I will."

"Now, I'll go down-stairs and bring them up," said the lawyer, with another look at his helpless victim.

Down-stairs hurried the lawyer: He was eager to have the affair finished.

"Every thing is prepared," he said, as he entered the room. "Follow me up-stairs, please, and we'll have the ceremony take place at once."

The three proceeded up-stairs.

"My ward, Miss Blanche Maybury, the bride; Doctor Pike," said Chubbet, introducing. The doctor bowed to the senseless girl with as much ceremony as if he thought she heard the introduction, though his keen-eye had instantly perceived the situation that she was in, when he entered the room.

"Now, Allyne, take her hand," said Chubbet. "Assist Miss Blanche to rise, Mrs. Grange."

By main force, for Blanche was as helpless as an infant, the housekeeper lifted her from the chair, stood her upon her feet, then held her up; while Allyne took the nerveless hand of the girl within his own.

This was his triumph; but even to him it seemed like a mockery to wed the helpless girl.

"Go ahead, doctor," said Chubbet.

And so the ceremony proceeded.

A few, brief minutes and Blanche Maybury became the wedded wife of Allyne Strathroy.

With his strong arms he folded the young girl to his heart, and pressed a burning kiss, full of passionate love, upon the pale lips.

But the bride—oh, the mockery of that title in such a wedding as this!—gave back no return kiss. The yielding flesh he held within his arms was as a marble statue.

But Allyne felt that he had triumphed. At last he had won the prize—the prize, to gain which he had risked all—dared as few men had dared before; taken all hazards, even to staining his soul with a crimson crime, and his hand scarlet with blood.

The cup of happiness was at his lip!

The loud ringing of the door-bell caused all the actors in this terrible scene to start, excepting the victim—the senseless girl.

Then came the sound of hurried footsteps on the stairs. The door was flung violently open, and a servant rushed into the room, but ere he could speak the doorway was filled by strange visitors. First came Mordaunt, the actor, then two policemen and then Leonard Osmond.

"What means this intrusion?" cried Chubbet, in anger.

"I have here a warrant to arrest that man!" cried Mordaunt, pointing to Allyne, who still held the senseless form of Blanche to his breast. But, on the entrance of the little knot of people he had thrust his left hand in his breast. The action was concealed from view by the head of the girl.

"Upon what charge?" asked Chubbet, in wonder.

"Murder!" cried Mordaunt.

All started in amazement, except the new-comers.

"Dog!" cried Allyne, "you have woven a web around me—have hunted me down—now take your reward," and, before any one could guess his intention, he drew a pistol—a small Derringer—from his breast pocket, leveled it full at the head of Mordaunt, and fired. With a groan, the actor fell forward on his face.

Strathroy uttered a yell of demoniac triumph as he beheld his foe fall; then, with the spring of a tiger, he dashed past the policemen—who had not expected the attempt—and through the door. Down the stairs he went and through the entry at headlong speed, the officers following quick upon his track.

Out into the street went Strathroy, then dashed up the avenue at the top of his speed, and turned into Thirty-eighth street. The officers followed hard upon him.

The streets were almost deserted, and the pursued and the pursuers had it all to themselves.

Down Thirty-eighth street toward the East river went the chase.

Every now and then a fresh policeman would join in as the fugitive passed his beat.

Strathroy ran like a hunted beast. His breath came thick and fast. His pursuers were so close upon him, that it gave him no chance to double upon and throw them off the scent.

They were pressing him straight for the river.

As yet the officers had not used their weapons, evidently believing they could run the fugitive down and capture him.

"If they are unarmed I am safe. The river is before me. I will find either safety or a grave in it." Such were the thoughts that passed through the brain of the hunted man as he ran steadily onward.

It was a bright moonlight night.

Oh, how in his heart the fugitive cursed the moonbeams!

The river was in sight. The officers uttered a shout.

They saw no avenue of escape open for the hunted man.

"Devils, I defy ye!" gasped Allyne, as he sprung upon the pier, and still ran onward.

Another shout came from the officers.

The fugitive now must either surrender or leap into the river.

Allyne reached the end of the pier, paused one single moment, then leaped boldly into the water.

The officers uttered a cry of rage.

They rushed to the end of the pier.

Allyne appeared above water some little distance out. The officers fired. The fugitive disappeared.

The cry went up that he was hit.

But a few minutes more and again he appeared above water, still further out. It was clear he was an excellent swimmer. Again the officers fired, and again he disappeared. But they knew this time that he was not hit. So, eagerly, they waited for him to appear the third time.

He came to the surface almost beyond revolver-range. The officers fired again.

A groan of pain came over the surface of the water; the fugitive threw up his arms—beat the water in agony for a few moments, then, with a cry that thrilled through the ears of the officers like a knife cut, he sunk to rise no more before their gaze.

The clouds gathered over the face of the moon, the rays breaking through formed strange shapes, and in the sky came the clear semblance of a great scarlet hand!

Allyne Strathroy was never seen again in this life.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FIRST ALLYNE STRATHROY.

DUKE, the Slasher, sat in his den—a little front room over a liquor store in Bayard street—in an extremely bad humor. His face was almost covered with strips of court-plaster placed over the saber cut which the actor had given him on the night of the assault.

A bottle of whisky and a glass stood on the table beside which the Slasher sat; also a pitcher of water.

It was the morning following the night whereon the events had taken place that we related in our last chapter.

Duke's wound was an extremely painful one, although by no means dangerous. The bad condition of his system, steeped in liquor, aggravated the wound. And even now, despite the commands of his doctor, he would not keep from liquor.

"Curse the luck," he cried. "I'm a putty looking picture, I am! My head is swelled up as big as a bushel basket. I feel as if it didn't belong to me at all. But, I'll be even with that cove, blow me if I don't!"

Then the sounds of footstep ascending the stairs that led to his room fell upon the ears of the wounded man.

"Hallo," he muttered, "that step sounds familiar. Some of the boys, maybe, comin' to see the old man."

Then the door opened, and, to the surprise and horror of the Slasher, the murdered man, James Kidd, walked into the room. He looked about the same as he had looked on the night when the Slasher had parted with him weeks before—the night on which he had been murdered. He was paler in the face, and his hair was cropped close to his head. He was dressed in a rough, dark suit, and wore a red shirt.

Duke started to his feet with a cry of alarm. He thought that he beheld a specter.

"Don't be afraid, Duke. I am alive," said Kidd, guessing the fear of the other.

"Holy Moses!" cried Duke, in wonder; "are you alive? Why, I saw you laid out, with a knife-cut in you, too, big enough to let out half a dozen lives."

"I was only in a trance," said Kidd, taking a seat and helping himself to the whisky.

"But wasn't you buried?" asked the Slasher, resuming his seat.

"Yes."

"The deuce you were!" Duke couldn't understand this strange mystery.

"Yes," replied Kidd; "but I was dug up again by some body-snatchers, who were procuring 'subjects' for the doctors. I was taken by them to some doctor's office. They put me on a table to cut up. But the first cut of the knife brought the blood and brought me out of my trance. The doctors were alarmed, lest I should disclose how they procured their 'subjects.' They revived me, then gave me a suit of clothes—I had nothing on but my undershirt and drawers—and a little money, and put me out into the street. I wandered off, I don't know exactly where, for I think I was a little out of my head, but, at last, I got into some house down in Cherry street. I told the folks I was sick, and gave them what little money I had, and they kept me till this morning. Then my head got all right again, and I concluded to hunt my friends up."

"Well, you have had a time of it," said Duke, astonished at this strange story.

"Yes, but I'm worth a dozen dead men yet!" cried Kidd, with a bitter laugh.

"That's so," responded the Slasher. Then he took a good look at Kidd.

"Well, now I've got it!" Duke exclaimed, suddenly.

"Got what?" asked Kidd.

"Why, since you've been gone, I've had a little business with a cove on Fifth avenue, Allyne Strathroy. Do you know him?"

"I ought to," said Kidd, quietly. "He's the man that tried to kill me."

"That's what I thought, for I found the letter that you wrote to him. Well, when I saw him, his face looked familiar to me, but I couldn't guess where I had seen it. But I know now. He's the very image of you."

"That is not wonderful; we are half-brothers," said Kidd.

"You don't say so?"

"Yes, I am the son of Clinton Strathroy by his first wife, your sister Lizzie. Duke, you are my uncle," said Kidd.

"The blazes I am!" said Duke, astonished.

"Yes, my real name is Allyne Strathroy. And not only that, Duke; I am the heir to all this property left by my father, Clinton Strathroy. Your sister—my mother—was legally married, and they can't keep me out of my rights."

"That's the ticket! Justice at last!" cried Duke.

"I am going to see the lawyer instantly and put in my claim," said Kidd, rising.

"I'll go with you, though I ain't a handsome-looking object, just now, with this here head," said the Slasher.

"We'll go at once."

"Say, how did you find out all this?" asked the Slasher, who was considerably astonished at the strange revelation.

"I discovered it, no matter how; but, come, let us be off."

Kidd, who walked quite slowly and appeared weak, and the Slasher proceeded at once to the office of Weisel, the lawyer in Center street.

They found the lawyer in.

Weisel started in astonishment when he looked in the face of the young man.

"Allow me to introduce myself, sir," said Kidd. "I am Allyne Strathroy, the first. The child of Lizzie Strathroy—maiden name, Lizzie Duke—the sister of this gentleman."

"What!" exclaimed Weisel, astounded beyond measure at this strange introduction.

"You can easily see by my face, sir, that I am Allyne Strathroy, the elder, for I have been told that there is a strong resemblance between myself and my half-brother," said Kidd.

"A wonderful resemblance!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"It will be an easy thing, sir, to prove my identity," said Kidd. "The woman who took care of me when I was a child is in New York. Her name is Mary Kand, but she is more commonly called Irish Molly."

Here was another surprise for the lawyer. He had really stumbled upon the actual witness, in his quest to find one to represent her.

"Besides which, sir, you are probably aware that the first Allyne Strathroy had a peculiar mark upon the right arm."

"He had, sir," said Weisel, who was already convinced that the man who stood before him was Allyne Strathroy—

the first Allyne—the undoubted heir to the estate, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"The mark on the arm was three moles forming a triangle, was it not?"

"It was, sir."

"Look!"

Then Kidd stripped off his coat, rolled up his right shirt-sleeve, and there on the arm, clear and distinct, were the three moles forming the triangle. There could not be a doubt as to the identity of the heir.

"My little stake is gone up in a balloon!" muttered Weisel, in disgust.

"I suppose, Mr. Weisel, that you will have no objection to undertaking the charge of my case?" said Kidd.

"Of course not, sir!" exclaimed Weisel, in joy at the prospect of getting something to reward him for his trouble.

"You had better see Mr. Allyne Strathroy—the second Allyne, who has so long enjoyed what is mine by rights—at once," said Kidd.

"No need of that," observed Weisel. "Mr. Chubbet is the lawyer retained by him. But there isn't any need of seeing any of the opposing party. Your case, sir, is good beyond a doubt. I should let the first notification be the serving of the papers."

"No, I prefer to see this Mr. Chubbet. I have an idea that my rights will not be contested, but that they will yield the estate without a struggle," said Kidd.

"I think not, sir; but still, have your own way in the matter. We can take a coach and go to the lawyer's house at once."

The three left the office, got into a hack and proceeded up-town.

Now see on what little, trivial things hangs the destiny of man.

The hack went up Broadway, but was stopped in its course—right in front of the Metropolitan Hotel—by a slight jam of vehicles in the street. Something very unusual on that part of Broadway.

Kidd put his head out of the coach window to discover what the matter was.

A man standing on the steps of the Metropolitan Hotel caught sight of his face. He was one of a little knot of gentlemen who were talking together. But the moment his eyes fell upon the face of Kidd looking from the coach window, he started as though struck by an electric shock.

The vehicles disengaged themselves from the jam, and the coach containing the three whose progress we are tracing went on.

The man on the steps turned hastily to one of his companions.

"Thorne," he said, "have you a revolver?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Lend it to me, quick."

Somewhat astonished, the gentleman handed the revolver—a small Smith and Wesson's.

"I'll see you again," he said, hastily, to his friends; then he ran to one of the hackmen standing on the curbstone.

"You see that hack with the gray horses?" he asked, pointing to the one that held the three.

"Yes."

"Ten dollars if you'll follow that hack!"

Then he jumped into the coach. The driver mounted and they followed in pursuit.

Up Broadway went the hack containing the three, turned into Madison avenue, and drove to the residence of Chubbet. The coach in chase halted half a block below.

The three entered the house.

James Kidd—or Allyne Strathroy as he now claimed to be—had little idea that the avenger was on his track

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FATE OF JAMES KIDD.

LAWYER CHUBBET received his visitors in his parlor. Like all the rest, he started in astonishment, when they beheld the strange resemblance that Kidd bore to Allyne Strathroy.

Briefly Kidd explained who he was and his claim to the Strathroy estate.

"Well," said Chubbet, "I do not think that your claim will be disputed. Mr. Allyne Strathroy, your half-brother,

who has held the estate, is dead, and has left no heirs who will contest your rights under the will of your father." Then Chubbet briefly explained the circumstances of Allyne's death at the hands of the police while he was striving to escape from them.

"I suppose the evening papers will have a full account of the death of the unfortunate young man to whom you bear such a striking resemblance," he said, in conclusion.

"Then my just claim to my father's property will not be disputed?" said Kidd, a look of triumph upon his face.

"Not by me, sir," replied the lawyer. "All you will have to do is to prove your identity—which I have no doubt you can easily do—and you can take possession of the estate without a contest."

"At last I triumph!" muttered Kidd, between his teeth in fierce joy.

Then a servant entered the room.

"Two gentlemen are at the door and wish to see Mr. Chubbet on particular business; also Mr. Kidd," said the servant.

Kidd's face wore a look of apprehension. How could any one know that *he* was there?

"Show them in," said Chubbet.

The servant retired.

An apprehension of danger came over Kidd. His brow became overcast, and he nervously clutched a knife which he had concealed in his pocket.

The door opened and the servant ushered in the actor, Edmund Mordaunt, and a policeman.

Mordaunt was the man who had followed the three in the hack.

The bullet fired by Allyne Strathroy which had felled him to the floor, apparently lifeless, had only stunned him. It had passed along the side of his temple, just grazing it, and that was all.

It was evidently not in his destiny to die by the hand of Allyne Strathroy, for thrice had he sought to take the life of the actor, and thrice had he failed.

When Kidd's eyes fell upon the face of Mordaunt, he seemed like one struck by the lightning's bolt. His face became livid, and but for the support of the chair by which he was standing, he would have fallen to the floor.

"Living!" he muttered, between his clenched teeth.

"Sir," said the actor, addressing the lawyer, "for the second time I come to your house on the mission of vengeance."

"What do you mean?" asked Chubbet, in amazement.

"I come to arrest that man for murder!" Mordaunt exclaimed, pointing to Kidd.

"Murder!" cried in astonishment all except Kidd. He did not show a sign of wonder, but with a powerful effort he faced his accuser.

"Of whose murder am I charged?" he asked, in a cold, unnatural voice.

"Of the murder of Allyne Strathroy," replied Mordaunt.

"But how can that be possible?" exclaimed the lawyer, in wonder. "Allyne Strathroy was shot by the police, and sunk beneath the water in the East river last night."

"Sir, you have been the victim of a bold and heartless deception," replied Mordaunt. "Allyne Strathroy was lured to a house in Baxter street, and there murdered by this man some weeks ago."

"And the Allyne Strathroy who was shot last night?"

"Is that man there, James Kidd?"

This strange disclosure startled all except the accused. With firm-set teeth and frowning eyes he glared upon the man that had hunted him down.

"He decoyed Strathroy to his house and killed him there. Then he dressed the body in his clothes, while he himself assumed the garb worn by the murdered man. Aided by the strange resemblance that he bore to Allyne Strathroy, he boldly took his place in the world—stole the life of Allyne Strathroy. The boldness of the game made it a successful one. The body of Allyne Strathroy was found the next morning dressed in the clothes of James Kidd. Everyone thought it was James Kidd, and he was buried as such, while the real James Kidd, in the dress of Allyne Strathroy, de-

ceived all the world as to his identity, excepting myself. I had a suspicion of the truth from the first. I determined to learn if my suspicion was correct. In disguise, I procured first the signature of this man here, who then called himself Allyne Strathroy; then the signature of the real Allyne Strathroy. An expert decided that the first signature was a forgery. The real Allyne, too, is marked with a scar on the great toe of the left foot; take up the body of the man buried as James Kidd and you will find the scar, for it is the corpse of Allyne Strathroy, the victim of this man."

A dead silence followed this strange revelation. At first the hearers could hardly believe it, but when they looked at the man known as James Kidd—saw the wonderful likeness that he bore to Allyne Strathroy, they did not wonder that he had succeeded in his bold deception.

"The game is up," said Kidd, with a bitter oath. "This man has spoken the truth. I decoyed Allyne Strathroy to my house and killed him; then took his place in the world. Accident had revealed to me that we looked so much alike that we could not be told apart. The game was a desperate one, but I succeeded in it. I loved the same woman that this Allyne loved. I supposed, as we were half-brothers, our passions and our likings were the same, but our father gave me all his evil ways—to Allyne, his second son, all the good that was in his nature. The heart of the girl, though, detected the cheat, though her eyes did not. She loved Allyne, but she did not love me, though I was his living image. I knew that this man was my evil genius," and he pointed his white finger at Mordaunt. "I felt that either he must perish by my hand or I by his. I have lost the game."

"Secure your prisoner," said Mordaunt, to the officer.

"Your life first!" cried Kidd, wildly, as, knife in hand, he sprung at Mordaunt. But the actor was prepared for him, for he held his revolver ready cocked in his hand.

A sharp report rung through the room, and James Kidd, shot through the throat, sunk bleeding to the floor.

"It is over," he cried, writhing in the agonies of death. "It is fated that I die by your hand. I did kill Strathroy—but I did not know that he was my half-brother when I stained my hand with that scarlet crime. Oh! I am going—Blanche—for—you—"

Then the blood gushed through his throat and choked his utterance.

And with the name of the woman on his lips for whose sake he had given his soul to perdition, James Kidd breathed his last.

Both the first and second Allyne now slept in the cold embrace of the grim King of Terrors.

Our story is ended.

Blanche never knew that she had been married while under the influence of the drug. Chubbet, after the flight of the supposed Allyne, saw at once that it was better that the affair should never be made public. His housekeeper and the minister readily promised silence, and the young lawyer, Osmond, who had happened to be in the police court when Mordaunt applied for the warrant, and thus became one of the party who visited the Chubbet mansion, imagined that he had arrived just in time to prevent the marriage.

Blanche made her home with Margaret, and soon coming of age she was free to do what she liked.

Leonard Osmond became her lawyer, and in the settlement of her estate held lawyer Chubbet to a close account of his stewardship.

Blanche, in time, learned to love the young lawyer who had so faithfully served her when she was in peril, and at last became his wife, much to the delight of Margaret.

The "Slasher" is still a power in the Sixth ward, and votes as often on election day as ever.

Mordaunt married the sewing-girl, Crissie Moore, and he blesses the day when he first looked upon her little head with the odd-colored hair. Crissie makes the best little wife possible. The actor is steady now, and shines as a glittering "star" in the theatrical horizon. And in the warm summer days, he has a cosy cottage at Mystic on the Sound, and there to his friends, who make him flying visits, he often tells this story, that we have related, of the man who stained his hand scarlet with crime.

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